Rel. Theol.

THE

WORKS

OF

ROBERT HALL, A.M.

WITH

A MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE,

BY

OLINTHUS GREGORY, LL.D., F.R.A.S.

AND

A CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF HIS CHARACTER AND WRITINGS,

BY JOHN FOSTER,

AUTHOR OF "ESSAYS ON DECISION OF CHARACTER," ETC.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. V.

SERMONS.

Page

A Sermon on the Death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales 1

A Funeral Sermon for the Rev. Dr. Ryland . . . 39

On the Substitution of the Innocent for the Guilty . 73

NOTES OF SERMONS.

I On the Being and Name of Jehovah 109

II. The Spirituality of the Divine Nature 113

III. Outline of the Argument of Twelve Lectures on the Socinian Controversy 118

IV. On Christ's Divinity and Condescension 125

V. On the Spirit and Tendency of Socinianism . . . 130

VI. On Angels 142

VII. On the Personality of Satan 149

VIII. On the extreme Corruption of Mankind before the General Deluge 166

		Page
IX.	On the End of Man's Existence	174
X.	Claims of the Flesh	177
XI.	On the Cause, Agent, and Purpose of Regeneration	186
XII.	On Spiritual Death	194
XIII.	On Conversion, as illustrated by that of St. Paul	199
XIV.	On the Conversion of St. Paul	205
XV.	The Lamb slain, the object of Rapture to the Heavenly Hosts	214
XVI.	The Glory of Christ's Kingdom	221
XVII.	On Spiritual Leprosy	228
XVIII.	On Spiritual Leprosy	232
XIX.	On Counting the Cost.	240
XX.	Parallel between the War with the Canaanitish Nations, and that of Believers with their Spiritual Enemies	248
XXI.	On the Law of God in the Heart	257
XXII.	On Prayer for the Increase of Faith	264
XXIII.	Second Discourse on Prayer for the Increase of Faith.	267
XXIV.	On Wisdom	271
XXV.	On Engagedness of Heart in approaching unto God	277
XXVI.	On Family Worship	283
XXVII.	Reflections on the Inevitable Lot of Human Life	295
XXVIII.	On Chastisement resulting in Penitence	303
XXIX.	On the Comforts of Christians under either Worldly or Spiritual Trials	307
XXX.	On Humility before God	312

Page
XXXI. On Patience 320
XXXII. On Candour and Liberality, as evinced in promoting the Erection of Places of Worship . 325
XXXIII. On the Reward of the Pious in Heaven . . . 335
XXXIV. On Taking the Name of God in Vain . . . 342
XXXV. On the Origin and Import of the Name, Christians 352
XXXVI. On Love of the Brethren, as a Criterion of a State of Salvation 361
XXXVII. On the Duty of Intercession 368
XXXVIII. God's Eternity Considered, in Reference to the Suspension of his Promised Purposes . . 373
XXXIX. The Lord's-Day commemorative of Christ's Resurrection 380
XL. Christ's Care over Churches and Ministers . . 384
XLI. No Temple in Heaven 389

A SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY

THE DEATH OF HER LATE ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE

PRINCESS CHARLOTTE OF WALES,

PREACHED AT

HERVEY LANE, LEICESTER.

November 16, 1817.

[PRINTED FROM THE SEVENTEENTH EDITION.]

A SERMON.

JEREMIAH XV. 9.

She hath given up the ghost: her sun is gone down while it was yet day.

It has been the approved practice of the most enlightened teachers of religion to watch for favourable occasions to impress the mind with the lessons of wisdom and piety; with a view to which they have been wont to advert to recent events of an interesting order, that, by striking in with a train of reflection already commenced, they might the more easily and forcibly insinuate the instruction it was their wish to convey. A sound discretion, it must be acknowledged, is requisite to make a selection. To descend to the details and occurrences of private life, would seldom consist with the dignified decorum suited to religious assemblies: the events to which the attention is directed on such occasions should be of a nature somewhat extraordinary, and calculated to produce a deep and permanent impression. Admonition, imparted under such circumstances, is styled, in scripture, a word in season, or, as it is emphatically expressed in the original, *a word on the wheels*, denoting the peculiar facility with which it makes its way to the heart.

In such a situation, the greatest difficulty a speaker has to surmount is already obviated; attention is awake, an interest is excited, and all that remains is to lead the mind, already sufficiently susceptible, to objects of per-

manent utility. He originates nothing; it is not so much he that speaks, as the events which speak for themselves; he only presumes to interpret their language, and to guide the confused emotions of a sorrowful and swollen heart into the channels of piety.

You are aware, my brethren, how strongly these observations apply to that most affecting occurrence which has recently spread such consternation through this great empire; an event which combines so many circumstances adapted to excite commiseration and concern, that not to survey it with attention, not to permit it to settle on the heart, would betray the utmost insensibility.

Devout attention to the dealings of Providence is equally consonant to the dictates of reason and of scripture. He who believes in the superintendence of an eternal mind over the affairs of the universe, is equally irrational and indevout in neglecting to make the course of events the subject of frequent meditation; since the knowledge of God is incomparably more important than the most intimate acquaintance with our fellow-creatures; and as the latter is chiefly acquired by an attentive observation of their conduct, so must the former be obtained in the same way. The operations of Providence are marked with a character as expressive of their great Author as the productions of human agency; and the same Being who speaks like himself in his word, acts like himself in the moral economy of the universe.

However inferior in precision and extent the knowledge derived from the last of these sources, compared to the copious and satisfactory information afforded by the Scriptures, it will appear too important to be neglected, when it is considered that it is *antecedent*, and that, supposing it is not sufficient of itself to evince the existence of a Deity, it is impossible for revelation to supply that defect. The word of God assumes the certainty of his being and attributes, as a truth already sufficiently ascertained by the light of nature, while it proceeds to inform us on a multitude of subjects which elude the researches of finite reason. To us who have access to both these sources of information, they serve to illustrate each

other: the obscurities of providence are elucidated by scripture; the declarations of scripture are verified by providence. One unfolds, as far as it is suitable to our state, the character and designs of the mysterious Agent; the other displays his works; and the admirable harmony, which is found to subsist between them, strengthens and invigorates our confidence in both.

Hence, a disregard to the operations of the Deity in his providential dispensations, is frequently stigmatized in scripture as an unequivocal symptom of impiety. *Woe unto them*, says Isaiah, *that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! and the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge.*"*

The striking analogy which the course of nature and providence bears to the peculiar discoveries of revelation, has been traced by an eminent prelate with a depth and precision which reflect honour on human nature.† It is not my intention to enter on this topic: let me only be permitted to remark, that the analogy extends not only to the discoveries themselves, but to the manner in which they are conveyed. In both, a constant appeal is made to facts. A large portion of the Bible is devoted to history, where the grand truths which are taught are intimately incorporated with the narrative, and mingled with the character and transactions of living agents; by which they are rendered far more impressive than if they had remained in an abstract and didactic form.

How languid the impression produced by a bare statement of the doctrine of a particular providence, for example, compared to that which we derive from the history of Abraham, whom we see conducted from kingdom to kingdom by a divine hand, and instructed where to pitch his tent, and where to erect his altars. The

* Isaiah v 11—13. † Bishop Butler.

wonderful evolutions in the story of Joseph also illustrate the conduct of him whose *ways are in the deep, and his paths past finding out*, in a manner far more powerful than the clearest instruction conveyed in general propositions.

When the Almighty was pleased to introduce, by the advent of the Messiah, a more perfect and permanent economy of religion, he founded it entirely on facts, attested by the most unexceptionable evidence, and the most splendid miracles. The apostles were *witnesses*, who, by the signs and wonders they wrought, made that appeal to the senses of men, which had been previously made to their own; and the doctrines which they taught in their writings were little more than natural consequences resulting from the undoubted truth of their testimony. If they wish to inculcate the doctrine of a resurrection and future judgement, they deem it sufficient to appeal to the fact of Christ's resurrection and session at the right hand of God; they present no evidence of a future state, except what ultimately terminates in the person of the Saviour, as the first-begotten from the dead; and most anxiously warn us against resting our hope of salvation on any other basis than that of a sensible sacrifice, *the offering of the body of Christ once for all.* Thus, whatever is sublime and consolatory in the christian religion originates in facts and events which appealed to the senses, and passed in this visible theatre; though their ultimate result is commensurate with eternity. In order to rescue us from the idolatry of the creature, and the dominion of the senses, He who is intimately acquainted with our frame makes use of sensible appearances, and causes his Son to become flesh, and to pitch his tent amongst us, that, by faith in his crucified humanity, we may ascend, as by a mystic ladder, to the abode of the Eternal.

Providence, it has already been remarked, conveys its most impressive lessons in the same shape; and by clothing the abstractions of religion in the realities of life, renders them in a manner palpable. While they remain in the form of general truths, and are the objects

of speculation, they affect us but little; they preserve us from the shallow sophistry of impiety, and conduct us to just conclusions on subjects of the last moment; but their control over the heart and conduct is scarcely felt. In order to be deeply impressed, we require some object to be presented more in unison with the sensitive part of our nature—something more precise and limited—something which the mind may more distinctly realize, and the imagination more firmly grasp. The process of feeling widely differs in this respect from that of reasoning, and is regulated by opposite laws. In reasoning, we recede as far as possible from sensible impressions; and the more general and comprehensive our conclusions, and the larger our abstractions, provided they are sustained by sufficient evidence, the more knowledge is extended, and the intellect improved. Sensibility is excited, the affections are awakened, on the contrary, on those occasions in which we tread back our steps, and descending from generalities, direct the attention to individual objects and particular events. We all acknowledge, for example, our constant exposure to death; but it is seldom we experience the practical impression of that weighty truth, except when we witness the stroke of mortality actually inflicted. We universally acknowledge the uncertainty of human prospects, and the instability of earthly distinctions; but it is when we behold them signally destroyed and confounded, that we feel our presumption checked, and our hearts appalled.

For this reason, He who spake as never man spake, was wont to convey his instructions by sensible images, and in familiar apologues, that, by concentrating the attention within the sphere of particular occurrences, and individual objects, the impressions of his lessons might become more vivid and more profound.

It is thus that Providence is addressing us at the present moment: and if we are wise, we shall convert the melancholy event before us, not to the purposes of political speculation, fruitless conjecture, or anxious foreboding, but (what is infinitely better) to a profound consideration of the hand of God; and then, though we

may be at a loss to explore the reason of his conduct, we shall be at none how to improve it.

Criminal as it is always, not to mark the footsteps of Deity, the guilt of such neglect is greatly aggravated, when he comes forth from his place to execute his judgements, and display his wrath; when he is pleased, as at present, to extinguish in an instant the hopes of a nation, to clothe the throne in sackcloth, and involve a kingdom in mourning. The greatness, the suddenness of this calamity, accompanied with circumstances of the most tender and affecting interest, speaks to the heart in accents which nothing but the utmost obduration can resist; so that were it the sole intention of Him who has inflicted it, to awaken the careless, and alarm the secure, among the higher orders especially, we are at a loss to perceive what could have been done more than has been accomplished. Whatever imagination can combine in an example of the uncertainty of life, the frailty of youth, the evanescence of beauty, and the nothingness of worldly greatness, in its highest state of elevation, is exhibited in this awful event in its full dimensions.

The first particular which strikes the attention in this solemn visitation, is the rank of the illustrious personage, who appears to have been placed on the pinnacle of society for the express purpose of rendering her fall the more conspicuous, and of convincing as many as are susceptible of conviction, that *man at his best estate is altogether vanity.* The Deity himself adorned the victim with his own hands, accumulating upon her all the decorations and ornaments best adapted to render her the object of universal admiration. He permitted her to touch whatever this sublunary scene presents that is most attractive and alluring, but to grasp nothing; and after conducting her to an eminence whence she could survey all the glories of empire as her destined possession, closed her eyes in death.

That such an event should affect us in a manner very superior to similar calamities which occur in private life, is agreeable to the order of nature, and the will of God; nor is the profound sensation it has produced to be con-

sidered as the symbol of courtly adulation. The catastrophe itself, it is true, apart from its peculiar circumstances, is not a rare occurrence. Mothers often expire in the ineffectual effort to give birth to their offspring; both are consigned to the same tomb, and the survivor, after witnessing the wreck of so many hopes and joys, is left to mourn alone, *refusing to be comforted, because they are not.* There is no sorrow which imagination can picture, no sign of anguish which nature agonized and oppressed can exhibit, no accent of woe, but what is already familiar to the ear of fallen, afflicted humanity; and the roll which Ezekiel beheld, flying through the heavens, inscribed within and without *with sorrow, lamentation, and woe*, enters, sooner or later, into every house, and discharges its contents in every bosom. But in the private departments of life, the distressing incidents which occur are confined to a narrow circle. The hope of an individual is crushed, the happiness of a family is destroyed; but the social system is unimpaired, and its movements experience no impediment, and sustain no sensible injury. The arrow passes through the air, which soon closes upon it, and all is tranquil. But when the great lights and ornaments of the world, placed aloft to conduct its inferior movements, are extinguished, such an event resembles the apocalyptic vial poured into that element which changes its whole temperature, and is the presage of fearful commotions, of thunders, lightnings, and tempests.

Independently of the political consequences that may result from an event which, by changing the order of succession, involves the prospects of the nation in obscurity, we are formed to be peculiarly affected by the spectacle of prostrate majesty, and fallen greatness. We are naturally prone to associate with the contemplation of exalted rank, the idea of superior felicity. We perceive in persons of that station, a command over the sources of enjoyment, a power of gratifying their inclinations in a multitude of forms from which others are precluded: and as they appear to possess the means of supplying every want, of obviating every inconvenience, and of

alleviating, to a considerable extent, every sorrow incident to humanity, it is not to be wondered at that we regard them as the darlings of nature, and the favourites of fortune. The share they possess of the bounties and indulgences of Providence, is so much beyond the ordinary measure of allotment, and so large a portion of human art and industry is exerted in smoothing their passage, and strewing flowers in their path, that we almost necessarily associate ideas of superior enjoyment with a description of persons, for whose gratification the inferior classes seem born to toil.

We are so constituted also, that the sight of felicity, when it is not mixed with envy, is always connected with pleasing emotions, whether it is considered as possessed by ourselves or by others; not excepting even the animal creation. For who can behold their harmless pleasures, the wild gambols of their young, rioting in the superabundance of life and excess of pleasure, without experiencing a momentary exhilaration? As their enjoyments are considered too scanty and limited to excite a feeling of envy, so, from an opposite cause, the privileges attached to an elevated station seldom produce it. Happily for mankind, the corrosions of that baleful passion are almost entirely confined to equals, or to those between whom there exist some pretensions to equality; who, having started from nearly the same level, have recently distanced each other in the chase of distinction or of glory. But when the superiority we contemplate has been long possessed, when it is such as renders competition hopeless, and comparison absurd, the feelings of rivalry are superseded by an emotion of respect, and the spectacle presented of superior felicity, produces its primary and natural effect. We dwell with complacency on a system of arrangements so exquisitely adapted apparently to the production of happiness, and yield a sort of involuntary homage to the person in whom it centres, without appearing to disturb our pretensions, or interfere with our pursuits. Hence, of all factitious distinctions, that of birth is least exposed to envy; the thought of aspiring to an equality in that respect, being

instantly checked by the idea of impossibility. When we turn our eyes towards the possessors of distinguished opulence and power, so many glittering appendages crowd on the imagination, productive of agreeable emotion, that we lose sight of the essential equality of the species, and think less of the persons themselves, than of the artificial splendour which surrounds them.

That there is some illusion in these sentiments, that the balance in respect of real enjoyment is far from being so decidedly in favour of the opulent and the great, as they prompt us to imagine, is an indubitable fact. Nevertheless, the disposition they create to regard the external appearances of opulence and power, with respect unmingled with envy, and to acquiesce with pleasure in the visible superiority they confer, is productive of incalculable benefit. But for this, the distinctions of rank, and the privileges and immunities attached to each, on which much of the tranquillity and all the improvements of society depend, would fall a prey to an unfeeling rapacity; the many would hasten to seize on the exclusive advantages of the few; and the selfish passions, uncontrolled by a more refined order of feeling, would break forth with a fury that would quickly overwhelm the mounds and fences of legal authority. By means of the sentiments to which we have adverted, society exerts a sort of plastic power over its members, which forms their habits and inclinations to a cheerful acquiescence in the allotments of Providence, and bestows on the positive institutions of man the stability of nature.

As the necessary consequence of these sentiments, when great reverses befall the higher orders, the mind experiences a kind of revulsion; the contrast of their present with their past situation, produces a deeper sympathy than is experienced on other occasions. We measure the height from which they fell, and calculate the extent of their loss on a scale proportioned to the value we have been accustomed to attach to the immunities and enjoyments of which it deprives them. The sight of such elaborate preparations for happiness rendered abortive, of a majestic fabric so proudly seated and

exquisitely adorned suddenly overturned, disturbs the imagination like a convulsion of nature, and diffuses a feeling of insecurity and terror, as though nothing remained on which we could repose with confidence. Hence, the misfortunes of princes who have survived their greatness, and terminated a brilliant career by captivity and death, have been selected by poets in every age as the basis of those fictions which are invented for the purpose of producing commiseration.

To guard against these feelings being carried to excess, so as to induce an oblivion of moral distinction, a sacrifice of principle, a mean and pusillanimous prostration before the profligate and the vicious; to urge the necessity of correcting their aberrations by the dictates of reason and religion, is foreign to our purpose. The utility of a class of feelings is not the less certain for their being liable to abuse. Let me rather avail myself of the awful dispensation before us, to suggest a warning to the possessors of these envied distinctions, not to overrate their value, nor confide in their continuance, which at most are but *the flower of the field*, as much distinguished by its superior frailty, as by its beauty. They belong to the *fashion of that world which passeth away;* they contribute much to embellish and beautify this transitory abode, to the ornament of which the Supreme Being has shown himself not inattentive. As the God of order, whatever tends to secure and perpetuate it, is the object of his approbation; nor can we doubt that he regards with complacency that distribution of men into distinct orders, which assimilates the social system to that variety which pervades the economy of nature.

Let their possessors remember, however, that they must shortly be divested of the brilliant appendages and splendid ornaments of rank and station, and enter into a world where they are unknown; where they will carry nothing but the essential elements of their being, impressed with those indelible characters which must sustain the scrutiny of Omniscience. These artificial decorations, be it remembered, are not, properly speaking, their own; the elevation to which they belong is momen-

tary; and as the merit of an actor is not estimated by the part which he performs, but solely by the truth and propriety of his representation, and the peasant is often applauded where the monarch is hissed; so when the great drama of life is concluded, he who allots its scenes and determines its period, will take an account of his servants, and assign to each his punishment or reward, in his proper character. The existence of a perfect and eternal mind, renders such an order of things necessary; for with whatever skill society may be organized, still it will make but a faint approximation to our limited conceptions of justice; and since there is an original mind in which these ideas subsist in their utmost perfection, whence the finite conception of justice is transcribed, they must at some period or other be realized. That they are not so at present is obvious. Merit is often depressed, vice exalted; and with the best regulations of human wisdom, executed with the utmost impartiality, malevolence will ever be armed with the power of inflicting a thousand nameless indignities and oppressions, with perfect impunity. Though the efficacy of human laws is far more conspicuous in restraining and punishing than in rewarding, in which their resources are extremely limited, it is only those flagrant offences that disturb the public tranquillity to which they extend; while the silent stream of misery issuing from private vice, which is incessantly impairing the foundations of public and individual happiness, by a secret and invisible sap, remains unchecked. The gradations even of rank, which are partly the cause and partly the effect of the highest social improvements, are accompanied with so many incidental evils, that nothing but an enlarged contemplation of their ultimate tendency and effect, could reconcile us to the monstrous incongruities and deformities they display, in wealth which ruins its possessor, titles which dignify the base, and influence exerted to none but the most mischievous purposes. The enlightened observer of human affairs is often struck with horror at the consequences incidentally resulting from laws and institutions which, on account of their general utility,

command his unfeigned veneration. These are the unequivocal indications of a fallen state; but since it is also a state of probation, the irregularities by which it is distinguished, in the frequent exaltation of the wicked and the humiliation and depression of the righteous, are such as furnish the fittest materials for trial. What state, let me ask, is better calculated than the present, to put it to the test, whether we will suffer ourselves to be swayed by the dictates of reason, or the fascinations of pleasure; whether we will allow the future to predominate over the present, the things that are invisible over those that are seen; and, preferring an eternal recompense with God to the transitory objects of concupiscence, submit to be controlled by his will, and led by his Spirit.

Whatever reception these views may meet with, one thing is certain, that it is invariably the most necessary they should be inculcated where they are the most unwelcome; and that if there be any one description of persons more in danger than another, of being lulled into a forgetfulness of future prospects, it is to them, especially, the warning voice should be directed, the eternal world unveiled. And who, but will acknowledge, that this danger is especially incident to such as bask in the smiles of fortune, and, possessing an unlimited command over the sources of enjoyment, are bound to the world by the most vivid associations of pleasure and of hope? *Give me neither poverty nor riches*, said one of the wisest of men, *lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or, lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of God in vain.* While riches exempt their possessors from the temptation of meaner vices, his observation taught him their peculiar exposure to practical impiety, and to that forgetfulness of God which is the root and core of all our disorders.

Let them turn their eyes, then, for a moment, to this illustrious Princess; who, while she lived, concentred in herself whatever distinguishes the higher orders of society, and may now be considered as addressing them from the tomb.

Born to inherit the most illustrious monarchy in the

world, and united at an early period to the object of her choice, whose virtues amply justified her preference, she enjoyed (what is not always the privilege of that rank) the highest connubial felicity, and had the prospect of combining all the tranquil enjoyments of private life, with the splendour of a royal station. Placed on the summit of society, to her every eye was turned, in her every hope was centred, and nothing was wanting to complete her felicity, except perpetuity. To a grandeur of mind suited to her royal birth and lofty destination, she joined an exquisite taste for the beauties of nature and the charms of retirement; where, far from the gaze of the multitude, and the frivolous agitations of fashionable life, she employed her hours in visiting, with her distinguished consort, the cottages of the poor, in improving her virtues, in perfecting her reason, and acquiring the knowledge best adapted to qualify her for the possession of power, and the cares of empire. One thing only was wanting to render our satisfaction complete, in the prospect of the accession of such a Princess; it was, that she might become the living mother of children.

The long wished-for moment at length arrived: but alas; the event anticipated with such eagerness will form the most melancholy part of our history.

It is no reflection on this amiable Princess, to suppose that in her early dawn, with the *dew of her youth* so fresh upon her, she anticipated a long series of years, and expected to be led through successive scenes of enchantment, rising above each other in fascination and beauty. It is natural to suppose she identified herself with this great nation, which she was born to govern; and that, while she contemplated its preeminent lustre in arts and in arms, its commerce encircling the globe, its colonies diffused through both hemispheres, and the beneficial effects of its institutions extending to the whole earth; she considered them as so many component parts of her grandeur. Her heart, we may well conceive, would often be ruffled with emotions of trembling ecstasy, when she reflected that it was her province to

live entirely for others, to compose the felicity of a great people, to move in a sphere which would afford scope for the exercise of philanthropy the most enlarged, of wisdom the most enlightened; and that, while others are doomed to pass through the world in obscurity, she was to supply the materials of history, and to impart that impulse to society, which was to decide the destiny of future generations. Fired with the ambition of equalling, or surpassing, the most distinguished of her predecessors, she probably did not despair of reviving the remembrance of the brightest parts of their story; and of once more attaching the epoch of British glory to the annals of a female reign. It is needless to add that the nation went with her, and probably outstripped her, in these delightful anticipations. We fondly hoped, that a life so inestimable would be protracted to a distant period, and that, after diffusing the blessings of a just and enlightened administration, and being surrounded by a numerous progeny, she would, gradually, in a good old age, sink under the horizon, amidst the embraces of her family, and the benedictions of her country. But alas! these delightful visions are fled, and what do we behold in their room, but the funeral pall and shroud, a palace in mourning, a nation in tears, and the shadow of death settled over both like a cloud! O the unspeakable vanity of human hopes! the incurable blindness of man to futurity! ever doomed to grasp at shadows, to seize with avidity what turns to dust and ashes in his hands, *to sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.*

How must the heart of the royal parent be torn with anguish on this occasion; deprived of a daughter, who combined every quality suited to engage his affection and elevate his hopes; an only child, the heir of his throne; and doomed, apparently, to behold the sceptre pass from his posterity into other hands; his sorrow must be such as words are inadequate to portray. Nor is it possible to withhold our tender sympathy from the unhappy mother, who, in addition to the wounds she has received by the loss of her nearest relations, and by still more trying vicissitudes, has witnessed the extinction of her

last hope, in the sudden removal of one, in whose bosom she might naturally hope to repose her griefs, and find a peaceful haven from the storms of life and the tossings of the ocean. But above all, the illustrious consort of this lamented Princess is entitled to the deepest commiseration. How mysterious are the ways of Providence, in rendering the virtues of this distinguished personage the source of his greatest trials! By these he merited the distinction to which monarchs aspired in vain, and by these he exposed himself to a reverse of fortune, the severity of which can only be adequately estimated by this illustrious mourner. These virtues, however, will not be permitted to lose their reward. They will find it in the grateful attachment of the British nation, in the remembrance of his having contributed the principal share to the happiness of the most amiable and exalted of women; and, above all, we humbly hope, when the agitations of time shall cease, in a re-union with the object of his attachment, before the presence of Him who will *wipe every tear from the eye.*

When Jehovah was pleased to command Isaiah the prophet to make a public proclamation in the ears of the people, what was it, think you, he was ordered to announce? Was it some profound secret of nature, which had baffled the inquiries of philosophers? or some great political convulsion which was to change the destiny of empires? No: these were not the sort of communications most suited to the grandeur of his nature, or the exigencies of ours. *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.** Instead of presenting to our eyes the mutations of power, and the revolutions of states and kingdoms, he exhibits a more awful and affecting spectacle—the human race itself withering

* Isaiah xl. 6—8.

under the breath of his mouth, perishing under his rebuke; while he plants his eternal word, which subsists from generation to generation, in undecaying vigour, to console our wretchedness, and impregnate the dying mass with the seed of immortality. As the frailty of man, and the perpetuity of *his* promises, are the greatest contrast the universe presents, so the practical impression of this truth, however obvious, is the beginning of wisdom, nor is there a degree of moral elevation to which it will not infallibly conduct us.

The annunciation of life and immortality by the gospel, did it contain no other truth, were sufficient to cast all the discoveries of science into shade, and to reduce the highest improvements of reason to the comparative nothingness which the flight of a moment bears to eternity.

By this discovery, the prospects of human nature are infinitely widened, the creature of yesterday becomes the child of eternity; and as felicity is not the less valuable in the eye of reason because it is remote, nor the misery which is certain, less to be deprecated because it is not immediately felt, the care of our future interests becomes our chief, and properly speaking, our only concern. All besides will shortly be nothing; and therefore, whenever it comes into competition with these, it is as the small dust of the balance.

Is it now any subject of regret, think you, to this amiable Princess, so suddenly removed, *that her sun went down while it was yet day?* or that, prematurely snatched from prospects the most brilliant and enchanting, she was compelled to close her eyes so soon on a world, of whose grandeur she formed so conspicuous a part? No: other objects occupy her mind, other thoughts engage her attention, and will continue to engage it for ever. All things with her are changed; and viewed from that pure and ineffable light, for which we humbly hope religion prepared her, the lustre of a diadem is scarcely visible, majesty emits a feeble and sickly ray, and all ranks and conditions of men appear but so many troops of pilgrims, in different garbs, toiling through the same

vale of tears, distinguished only by different degrees of wretchedness.

In the full fruition of eternal joys, she is so far from looking back with lingering regret on what she has quitted, that she is surprised it had the power of affecting her so much; that she took so deep an interest in the scenes of this shadowy state of being, while so near to an *eternal weight of glory;* and, as far as memory may be supposed to contribute to her happiness by associating the present with the past, it is not the recollection of her illustrious birth and elevated prospects, but that she visited the abodes of the poor, and learned to weep with those that weep; that, surrounded with the fascinations of pleasure, she was not inebriated by its charms; that she resisted the strongest temptations to pride, preserved her ears open to truth, was impatient of the voice of flattery; in a word, that she sought and cherished the inspirations of piety, and *walked humbly with her God.** This is fruit which survives when the flower withers—the only ornaments and treasures we can carry into eternity.

While we look at this event with the eyes of flesh, and survey it in the aspect it bears towards our national prospects, it appears a most singular and affecting catastrophe. But considered in itself, or, more properly, in its relation to a certain, though invisible futurity, its consequences are but commensurate to those which result from the removal of the meanest individual. He whose death is as little regarded as the fall of a leaf in the forest, and he whose departure involves a nation in despair, are, in this view of the subject, (by far the most important one,) upon a level. Before the presence of the great I AM, into which they both immediately enter, these distinctions vanish, and the true statement of the fact, on either supposition, is, that an immortal spirit has finished its earthly career; has passed the barriers of

* From the obscurity of the Author's situation, he must be supposed incapable of authenticating these traits in her character from his personal knowledge; but from the respectable publications in which they are related, he entertains no doubt of their truth.

the invisible world, to appear before its Maker, in order to receive that sentence which will fix its irrevocable doom, *according to the deeds done in the body.* On either supposition, an event has taken place which has no parallel in the revolutions of time, the consequences of which have not room to expand themselves within a narrower sphere than an endless duration. An event has occurred, the issues of which must ever baffle and elude all finite comprehensions, by concealing themselves in the depths of that abyss, of that eternity, which is the dwelling-place of Deity, where there is sufficient space for the destiny of each, among the innumerable millions of the human race, to develope itself, and without interference or confusion, to sustain and carry forward its separate infinity of interest.

That there is nothing hyperbolic or extravagant in these conceptions, but, that they are the *true sayings of God*, you may learn from almost every page of the sacred oracles. For what are they, in fact, but a different mode of announcing the doctrine taught us in the following words: *What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; or what shall he give in exchange for his soul?*

When it is considered that the doctrine of a life to come, is ascertained by the advent of the Messiah, with a degree of evidence so superior to that which attaches to any other futurity, that he who refuses to believe it on his testimony, would not be persuaded although one rose from the dead, the propensity to disregard it, however general, is the most astonishing phenomenon in nature. Man is naturally a prospective creature, endowed, not only with a capacity of comparing the present with the past, but also of anticipating the future, and dwelling with anxious rumination on scenes which are yet remote. He is capable of carrying his views, of attaching his anxieties, to a period much more distant than that which measures the limits of his present existence; capable, we distinctly perceive, of plunging into the depths of future duration, of identifying himself with the sentiments and opinions of a distant age, and of en-

joying, by anticipation, the fame of which he is aware he shall never be conscious, and the praises he shall never hear. So strongly is he disposed to link his feelings with futurity, that shadows become realities, when contemplated as subsisting there; and the phantom of posthumous celebrity, the faint image of his being, impressed on future generations, is often preferred to the whole of his present existence, with all its warm and vivid realities. The complexion of the day that is passing over him, is determined by the anticipations of the morrow: the present borrows its brightness and its gloom from the future, which, presenting itself to his contemplation, as in a mirror, incessantly agitates him with apparitions of terror or delight. In the calculations of interest, the mind is affected in the same manner; it is perpetuity which stamps its value on whatever we possess, so that the lowest epicure would prefer a small accession to his property to the most exquisite repast; and none are found so careless of futurity, as not to prefer the inheritance he may bequeath, to one of equal value, the title to which expires with his life.

How is it, then, that we find it so difficult to prevail upon men to fix their attention firmly on another world, that real future existence which reason assures us is probable, which revelation teaches us is certain, which is separated from us by so narrow a boundary, and into which thousands of our fellow-creatures are passing every moment? How is it that the professed followers of Him especially, who descended from heaven, who *came forth from the Father* to conduct us thither, are so indisposed to turn their thoughts and contemplations to that unchanging state of being, into which they are so shortly to enter? It is not, we perceive, that to move forward is not congenial with our mental constitution: it is not because we are so enchanted with the present scene, as to be incapable of diverting our attention from it; for we are continually disquieted by a restless desire of something future: it is not because we are seldom warned or reminded of another state of existence; for every funeral bell, every opening grave, every symptom of decay within,

and of change without us, is a separate warning, to say nothing of the present most affecting dispensation, which has filled this nation with such consternation and distress.

Were any other event of far inferior moment ascertained by evidence, which made but a distant approach to that which attests the certainty of a life to come; had we equal assurance that after a very limited, though uncertain period, we should be called to migrate into a distant land, whence we were never to return, the intelligence would fill every breast with solicitude; it would become the theme of every tongue; and we should avail ourselves with the utmost eagerness of all the means of information respecting the prospects which awaited us in that unknown country. Much of our attention would be occupied in preparing for our departure; we should cease to regard the place we now inhabit as our home, and nothing would be considered of moment but as it bore upon our future destination. How strange is it, then, that, with the certainty we all possess of shortly entering into another world, we avert our eyes as much as possible from the prospect; that we seldom permit it to penetrate us; and that the moment the recollection occurs, we hasten to dismiss it as an unwelcome intrusion! Is it not surprising, that the volume we profess to recognise as the record of immortality, and the sole depository of whatever information it is possible to obtain respecting the portion which awaits us, should be consigned to neglect, and rarely, if ever, consulted with the serious intention of ascertaining our future condition?

That a creature formed for an endless duration should be disposed to turn his attention from that object, and to contract his views and prospects within a circle which, compared to eternity, is but a mathematical point, is truly astonishing; and as it is impossible to account for it from the natural constitution of the mind, it must originate in some great *moral* cause. It shows that some strange catastrophe has befallen the species; that some deep and radical malady is inherent in the moral system

Though philosophers of a certain description may attempt to explain and justify it on some ingenious hypothesis; yet, in spite of metaphysical subtleties, the alarming inquiry will still return—How is it that the disposition of mankind is so much at variance with their prospects? that no train of reflections is more unwelcome than that which is connected with their eternal home? If the change is considered as a happy one,—if the final abode to which we are hastening is supposed to be an improvement on the present, why shrink back from it with aversion? If it is contemplated as a state of suffering, it is natural to inquire what it is that has invested it with so dark and sombre a character! What is it which has enveloped that species of futurities in a gloom which pervades no other? If the indisposition to realize a life to come arises in any measure from a vague presentiment that it will bring us, so to speak, into a closer contact with the Deity, by presenting clearer manifestations of his character and perfections, (and who can doubt that this is a principal cause?) the proof it affords of a great deterioration in our moral condition is complete. For who will suppose it possible a disposition to hide himself from his Creator should be an original part of the constitution of a reasonable creature? or what more portentous and unnatural, than for him that is formed to shun the presence of his Maker, and to place his felicity in the forgetfulness of Him *in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being?* If he is pained and disquieted whenever he is forcibly reminded of Him whose power sustains, and whose bounty replenishes the universe with whatever is good and fair; if the source of being and of happiness is the object of terror instead of confidence and love, it is not easy to conceive what can afford a stronger conviction of guilt, or a more certain presage of danger.

The conclusion to which we are conducted is confirmed by inspiration, which assures us that a great revolution has actually befallen the species; and that, in consequence of the entrance of sin into the world, we have incurred the forfeiture of the divine favour, and the

loss of the divine image. In this situation it is not difficult to perceive, that the economy adapted to our relief must include two things, the means of expiating guilt, and the means of moral renovation: in other words, an atoning sacrifice, and a sanctifying Spirit. Both these objects are accomplished in the advent of the Saviour, who, by presenting himself as a sin offering, has made ample satisfaction to offended justice, and purchased by his merits the renovating Spirit, which is freely offered to as many as sincerely seek it. By the former, the obstructions to our happiness arising from the divine nature, are removed; by the latter, the disqualification springing from our own. By providing a sacrifice of infinite value in the person of the Only Begotten, he has consulted his majesty as the righteous Governor of the world, and has reconciled the seemingly incompatible claims of justice and of mercy. By bestowing the Spirit as the fruit of *his* mediation and intercession, whose *soul was made an offering for sin*, pollution is purged, and that image of God restored to sinful creatures, which capacitates them for the enjoyment of pure and perfect felicity. Thus every requisite which we can conceive necessary in a restorative dispensation, is found in the gospel, exhibited with a perspicuity level to the meanest capacity, combined with such a depth in the contrivance, and such an exquisite adaptation to our state and condition, as surpass finite comprehension. This is the substance of those glad tidings which constitute the *gospel;* to the cordial reception of which, must all the difference be ascribed, which will shortly be found between the condition of the saved and the lost.

Be assured, my christian brethren, it is by a profound submission of the soul to this doctrine, offensive as it may be to the pride of human virtue, repugnant as it undoubtedly is to the dictates of philosophy, falsely so called, that we must *acquaint ourselves with God, and be at peace.* When we mention peace, however, we mean not the stupid security of a mind that refuses to reflect; we mean a tranquillity which rests upon an unshaken basis, which no anticipations, however remote, no

power of reflection, however piercing or profound, no evolutions which time may disclose or eternity conceal, are capable of impairing; a peace which is founded on the oath and promise of Him who cannot lie; which, springing from the consciousness of an ineffable alliance with the Father of spirits, makes us to share in his fulness, to become a partner with him in his eternity; a repose, pure and serene as the unruffled wave, which reflects the heavens from its bosom, while it is accompanied with a feeling of exultation and triumph, natural to such as are conscious that ere long, having overcome, they shall possess all things.

While the prize is so transcendently great, no unparalleled efforts, no incredible exertions, are requisite to obtain it; it is placed within the grasp of every hand. If the great sacrifice had not been presented, if the succours of heaven had not been offered, if the glad tidings had not been proclaimed, nor life and immortality brought to light, our condition would indeed have been deplorable; and little encouragement should we have had, to engage in the great work of seeking salvation. But now *all things are ready*, and the chief, or, rather, the only prerequisite, is a child-like docility, a disposition to derive wisdom from the fountain of light, strength from the strong, together with a fixed and immovable conviction, that the care of our eternal interests is the grand concern.

Some events, by the established course of nature, are rendered so certain, that, however important in their consequences, they are not the proper subjects of deliberation. Their certainty, assumed as a basis in all our calculations and reasonings, is entitled to great weight in adjusting the plan of future operation; but it is with a view to other objects that our schemes are formed, and our anxiety exerted. Other events are precluded from deliberation by an opposite reason, the perfect conviction that they will never arrive. Both these are regarded by wise men as fixed, immovable points, which supply motives for submission, but no incentives to exertion.

There is another class of futurities, whose existence is

not ascertained by immutable, independent causes; they are placed in some measure within our reach, are subjected in a degree to our control, and are neither so certain as to produce security, nor so impossible or improbable as to occasion despair. These form the motives to human activity, and the objects of rational pursuit; in the proper selection of which, and the application of means best adapted to their attainment, consists the whole wisdom of man. The hopes and fears associated with the contemplation of events of this nature, are the springs which set mankind in motion; and while the frivolous and the dissipated fix their attention on such as are productive of transient and momentary impressions, the wise in their generation select those which are the basis of permanent interests, such as wealth, power, and reputation; which, whoever acquires by a course of strenuous exertion, is applauded and extolled as a pattern for universal imitation. Yet, what extreme shortsightedness characterizes the most prosperous votary of the world, compared with the humblest candidate for immortality! *This their way is their folly, though their posterity approve their sayings.* Of the great prizes in human life, it is not often the lot of the most enterprising to obtain many: they are placed on opposite sides of the path, so that it is impossible to approach one of them, without proportionably receding from another; whence it results that the wisest plans are founded on a compromise between good and evil, where much that is the object of desire is finally relinquished and abandoned, in order to secure superior advantages. The candidate for immortality is reduced to no such alternative: the possession of his object comprehends all: it combines in itself, without imperfection and without alloy, all the scattered portions of good for which the votaries of the world are accustomed to contend. Such also is our constitution, and so little is the sublunary state adapted to be our rest, that we are usually more alive to the good we want, than to that which we possess; that, rendered delicate by indulgence, rather than satiated by enjoyment, the slightest check in the career of our de-

sires, inflicts a wound which their gratification in every other particular is incapable of healing. Thus the wretched Haman, in the highest plenitude of affluence and power, exclaimed, *All this availeth me nothing, while Mordecai sits in the gate.* Such is the capricious fastidiousness of the human heart, chiefly in those who are most pampered with the gifts of fortune, that the person whom nothing has the power of gratifying long, the merest trifle is sufficient to displease, so that he is often extremely chagrined and disquieted by the absence of that, whose presence would scarcely be felt. The fruition of religious objects calms and purifies, as much as it delights; it strengthens, instead of enervating, the mind, which it fills without agitating, and, by settling it on its proper basis, diffuses an unspeakable repose through all its powers.

As the connexion between means and ends is not so indissolubly fixed as to preclude the possibility of disappointment, and *the battle is not always to the strong, nor the race to the swift, nor riches to men of understanding*, the votary of the world is never secure of his object, which frequently mocks his pursuit, by vanishing at the moment when he is just on the point of seizing it. He often possesses not even the privilege of failing with impunity, and has no medium left between complete success and infallible destruction. In the struggles of ambition, in violent competitions for power or for glory, how slender the partition betwixt the widest extremes of fortune, and how few the steps and apparently slight the circumstances, which sever the throne from the prison, the palace from the tomb! *So Tibni died*, says the sacred historian, with inimitable simplicity, *and Omri reigned.* He who makes the care of his eternal interests his chief pursuit, is exposed to no such perils and vicissitudes. His hopes will be infallibly crowned with success. The soil on which he bestows his labour will infinitely more than recompense his care; and however disproportioned the extent and duration of his efforts to the magnitude of their object, however insufficient to secure it by their intrinsic vigour, the faithfulness of

God is pledged to bring them to a prosperous issue. *Ask*, said our Lord, *and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For whosoever asketh receiveth ; and whosoever seeketh findeth ; and whosoever knocketh, to him it shall be opened.* The pursuit of salvation is the only enterprise in which no one fails from weakness, none from an invincible ignorance of futurity, none from the sudden vicissitudes of fortune, against which there exists no effectual security, none from those occasional eclipses of knowledge and fits of inadvertence, to which the most acute and wakeful intellect is exposed. How suitable is it to the character of the Being who reveals himself by the name of *Love*, to render the object which is alone worthy of being aspired to with ardour, the only one to which all may, without presumption, aspire ; and while he conceals thrones and sceptres in the shadow of his hand, and bestows them where he pleases, with a mysterious and uncontrollable sovereignty, on opening the springs of eternal felicity, to proclaim to the utmost bounds of the earth, *Let him that is athirst come : and whomsoever will, let him partake of the water of life freely.*

But the impotence of the world never appears more conspicuous than when it has exhausted its powers in the gratification of its votaries, by placing them in a situation which leaves them nothing further to hope. It frustrates the sanguine expectations of its admirers as much by what it bestows, as by what it withholds, and reserves its severest disappointment for the season of possession. The agitation, the uncertainty, the varied emotions of hope and fear which accompany the pursuit of worldly objects, create a powerful interest, and maintain a brisk and wholesome circulation ; but when the pursuit is over, unless some other is substituted in its place, satiety succeeds to enjoyment, and pleasures cease to please. Tired of treading the same circle, of beholding the same spectacles, of frequenting the same amusements, and repeating the same follies, with nothing to awaken sensibility, or to stimulate to action, the minion of

fortune is exposed to an insuperable languor; he sinks under an insupportable weight of ease, and falls a victim to incurable dejection and despondency. Religion, by presenting objects ever interesting and ever new, by bestowing much, by promising more, and dilating the heart with the expectation of a certain *indefinite* good, clearly ascertained, though indistinctly seen, the pledge and earnest of which is far more delightful than all that irreligious men possess, is the only effectual antidote to this evil. *He that drinketh of this water shall never thirst.* The vanity which adheres to the world in every form, when its pleasures and occupations are regarded as *ultimate objects*, is at once corrected when they are viewed in connexion with a boundless futurity; and whatever may be their intrinsic value, they rise into dignity and importance when considered as the seed of a future harvest, as the path which, however obscure, leads to honour and immortality, as the province of labour allotted us, in order to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling.* Nothing is little which is related to such a system; nothing vain or frivolous which has the remotest influence on such prospects. Considered as a state of probation, our present condition loses all its inherent meanness; it derives a moral grandeur even from the shortness of its duration, when viewed as a contest for an immortal crown, in which the candidates are exhibited on a theatre, a spectacle to beings of the highest order, who, conscious of the tremendous importance of the issue, of the magnitude of the interest at stake, survey the combatants from on high with benevolent and trembling solicitude.

Finally, we are *made* for the enjoyment of eternal blessedness; it is our high calling and destination; and not to pursue it with diligence, is to be guilty of the blackest ingratitude to the Author of our being, as well as the greatest cruelty to ourselves. To fail of such an object, to defeat the end of our existence, and, in consequence of neglecting the great salvation, to sink at last under the frown of the Almighty, is a calamity which words were not invented to express, nor finite

minds formed to grasp. Eternity, it is surely not necessary to remind you, invests every state, whether of bliss or of suffering, with a mysterious and awful importance, entirely its own, and is the only property in the creation which gives that weight and moment to whatever it attaches, compared to which, all sublunary joys and sorrows, all interests which know a period, fade into the most contemptible insignificance. In appreciating every other object, it is easy to exceed the proper estimate; and even of the distressing event which has so recently occurred, the feeling which many of us possess, is probably inadequate to the occasion. The nation has certainly not been wanting in the proper expression of its poignant regret at the sudden removal of this most lamented Princess, nor of their sympathy with the royal family, deprived by this visitation of its brightest ornament. Sorrow is painted in every countenance, the pursuits of business and of pleasure have been suspended, and the kingdom is covered with the signals of distress. But what, my brethren, if it be lawful to indulge such a thought, what would be the funeral obsequies of a lost soul? Where shall we find the tears fit to be wept at such a spectacle? or, could we realize the calamity in all its extent, what tokens of commiseration and concern would be deemed equal to the occasion? Would it suffice for the sun to veil his light and the moon her brightness; to cover the ocean with mourning, and the heavens with sackcloth? or, were the whole fabric of nature to become animated and vocal, would it be possible for her to utter a groan too deep, or a cry too piercing, to express the magnitude and extent of such a catastrophe?

But it is time to draw the veil over this heart-withering prospect, remembering only *what manner of persons we ought to be*, who are walking on the brink of such an eternity, and possess no assurance but that the next moment will convey us to the regions of happiness or of despair. Impressed habitually with this solemn recollection, we shall *rejoice as those who rejoice not, we shall weep as those who weep not, we shall use the world*

as not abusing it, remembering that the end of all things is at hand.

It is scarcely to be supposed that so remarkable an example of the frailty and uncertainty of life as the recent providence has displayed, has failed of impressing serious reflection on the minds of multitudes; it is difficult to conceive of that degree of insensibility which could totally resist such a warning. But there is reason to fear that in a great majority of instances it has produced no salutary fruit, and will leave them, after a very short period, as careless and unconcerned about a preparation for an hereafter as before; like the unthinking feathered tribe, who, when one of the number falls by the hand of the fowler, are scared for a moment, and fly from the fatal spot with screams of horror, but quickly recovering their confidence, alight again on the same place, and expose themselves to the same danger. Thus many, whose gaiety has been eclipsed, and whose thoughtless career of irreligion and dissipation has experienced a momentary check, will doubtless soon return with eager impetuosity to the same course, as *the horse rusheth into battle.* The same amusements will enchant, the same society corrupt, and the same temptations ensnare them; with this very important difference, that the effort necessary to surmount the present impression will superinduce a fresh degree of obduration, by which they will become more completely accoutred in the panoply of darkness. The next visitation, though it may be in some respects more affecting, because more near, will probably impress them less; and as death has penetrated the palace in vain, though it should even come up into their chamber, and take away the delight of their eyes at a stroke, they will be less religiously moved.

What may we suppose is the reason of this; why are so many impressed, and so few profited? It is unquestionably because they are not obedient to the *first* suggestion of conscience. What that suggestion is, it may not be easy precisely to determine; but it certainly is *not* to make haste to efface the impression by frivolous amusement, by gay society, by entertaining reading, or

even by secular employment: it is probably to meditate and pray. Let the first whisper, be it what it may, of the internal monitor, be listened to as an oracle, as the still small voice which Elijah heard, when he wrapped his face in his mantle, recognizing it to be the voice of God. Be assured it will not mislead you; it will conduct you one step at least towards happiness and truth; and, by a prompt and punctual compliance with it, you will be prepared to receive ampler communications and superior light. If, after a serious retrospect of your past lives, of the objects you have pursued, and the principles which have determined your conduct, they appear to be such as will ill sustain the scrutiny of a dying hour, dare to be faithful to yourselves, and shun with horror that cruel treachery to your best interests, which would impel you to sacrifice the happiness of eternity to the quiet of a moment. Let the light of truth, which is the light of heaven, however painful for the present, be admitted in its full force; and whatever secrets it may discover *in the chambers of imagery*, while it unveils *still greater and greater abominations*, shrink not from the view, but entreat rather the assistance of Him whose prerogative it is to search the heart, and to try the reins, to render the investigation more profound and impartial. The sight of a penitent on his knees is a spectacle which moves heaven; and the compassionate Redeemer, who, when he beheld Saul in that situation, exclaimed, *Behold, he prayeth*, will not be slow or reluctant to strengthen you by his might, and console you by his Spirit. When a *new and living way* is opened *into the holiest of all*, by the blood of Jesus, not to avail ourselves of it, not to arise and go to our Father, but to prefer remaining at a guilty distance, encompassed with famine, to the rich and everlasting provisions of his house, will be a source of insupportable anguish when we shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, enter into the kingdom of God, and ourselves shut out. You are probably not aware of what importance it is to improve these sacred visitations; have not considered that they form a crisis, which if often neglected will never return. It is impos-

sible too often to inculcate the momentous truth, that the character is not formed by passive impressions, but by voluntary actions, and that we shall be judged hereafter, not by what we have felt, but by what we have done.

You will perceive, my brethren, that I have confined my attention, in this discourse, to such reflections as we would wish every individual to indulge, in the contemplation of this great national calamity, without adverting to its aspect on the political prospects and interests of the country. The discussion of the subject in that view of it is equally unsuited to my province, and to my talents. I leave it to politicians to investigate the effects it is likely to produce on the prosperity of the British empire; esteeming myself sufficiently happy if I may be the humble instrument of fixing your attention on subjects best fitted to prepare you for *a kingdom which cannot be moved;* being convinced, as you may infer from my constant practice, that this is neither the place nor the season for political discussion, and that the teachers of religion are called to a nobler occupation than to subserve the interests of a party, or fan the flames of public dissension. In perfect consistence with this observation permit me to remark, that it appears to me highly presumptuous to attempt to scan the secret purpose of the Deity, in this dispensation, by assigning it to *specific* moral causes. *His ways are in the great deep, and his paths past finding out.* That it ought to be considered as a signal rebuke and chastisement, designed to bring our sins to remembrance, there is no doubt; but to attempt to specify the particular crimes and delinquencies which have drawn down this visitation, is inconsistent with the modesty which ought to accompany all inquiries into the mysteries of Providence; and especially repugnant to the spirit which this most solemn and affecting event should inspire. At a time when every creature ought to tremble under the judgements of God, it ill becomes us to indulge in reciprocal recrimination; and when *the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint*, it is not for the members to usurp the seat of judgement, by hurling

accusations and reproaches against each other. Are there not sufficient provocations to be found in all ranks and classes, from the lowest to the highest, to justify and account for these and still greater severities? or is it necessary to look farther for the vindication of the equity of the divine proceeding, than to the open impiety and profaneness, the perjury and injustice, the profanation of the sabbath and contempt of sacred things, the profligacy of the lower, and the irreligion and impurity of the higher orders, which, notwithstanding the multitude of splendid exceptions, still form the national character?

That we are a people severely scourged and corrected, none will deny; but that we have *turned to him that smiteth us*, it would be presumption to assert. Yet if any people were ever more forcibly reminded of the interposition of Providence than another, it is certain we are that people; having been conducted through the most intricate and mysterious paths, in such a manner as totally to confound the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of the prudent, both in our adverse and prosperous fortunes. Preserved amidst the wreck of nations, and the hurricane of revolution which swept for twenty years over the face of Europe, with ruin and desolation in its train, we have not only been permitted to maintain our soil unviolated, and our independence unimpaired; but have come forth from a contest of unparalleled difficulty and extent, with a more splendid reputation, and in a more commanding attitude, than we possessed at any former period. Our successes, both by sea and land, have been so brilliant and decisive, that it is not easy to determine whether we have acquired most glory as a military or a maritime power; while our achievements on each element have been such as to distance all competition. A profound peace has at length succeeded to a scene of hostilities, which, for the fourth part of a century, covered the earth with armies, shook every kingdom to its basis, and ravaged and depopulated the fairest portion of the globe. But what has been the issue? We have retired from the combat, successful

indeed beyond our most sanguine expectations,—but bleeding, breathless, exhausted; with symptoms of internal weakness and decay, from which, if we ever entirely recover, it must be when the present generation has disappeared from the earth. When was it ever known before, that peace was more destructive than war? —that a people were more impoverished by their victories than their defeats? and that the epoch of their glory was the epoch of their sufferings? Peace, instead of being the nurse of industry and the harbinger of plenty, as the experience of ages had taught us to expect, has brought poverty, discontent, and distress in her train; inflicting all the privations of a state of hostility without its hopes; and all the miseries of war without its splendour. What but an Omnipotent hand could have infused such venom into the greatest of blessings as utterly to transform its nature, and cause it to produce some of the worst effects of the curse?

While we were engaged in the fearful struggle which has at length been so successfully terminated, it pleased the great Ruler of nations to visit our aged, beloved, and revered Monarch with one of the most dreadful calamities incident to human nature, the pressure of which still continues, we fear, with unabated severity. While we are deeply moved at the awful spectacle of majesty labouring under a permanent and hopeless eclipse, we are consoled with the reflection that he walked in the light while he possessed the light; that as long as the exercise of reason was continued, he communed with eternal truth; and that, from the shades which now envelope him, he will, at no very distant period, emerge into the brightness of celestial vision.

Though it may be difficult to conceive of a series of events more likely to awe the mind to a sense of the power and presence of the Deity, than those we have witnessed, he has thought fit to address us once more, if not in louder, yet in more solemn and affecting accents. An unexampled depopulation of the species by the sword, had indeed nearly rendered death the most familiar of all spectacles, and left few families unbereaved; but

neither the narrative of battles, nor the sight of carnage, is best suited to inculcate the lessons of mortality; nor are the moral features of that last enemy ever less distinctly discerned, than in the moments when he is most busy; or on those fields of slaughter, where he appears the principal agent. The "pomp and circumstance of war," the tumultuous emotions of the combatants, and the eager anxiety of the contending parties, attentive to the important political consequences attached to victory and defeat, absorb every other impression, and obstruct the entrance of serious and pensive reflection.

How different the example of mortality presented on the present occasion! Without the slightest warning, without the opportunity of a moment's immediate preparation, in the midst of the deepest tranquillity, at midnight, a voice was heard in the palace, not of singing men and singing women, not of revelry and mirth, but the cry, *Behold, the Bridegroom cometh.* The mother, in the bloom of youth, spared just long enough to hear the tidings of her infant's death, almost immediately, as if summoned by his spirit, follows him into eternity. "It is a night much to be remembered." Who foretold this event, who conjectured it, who detected at a distance the faintest presage of its approach, which, when it arrived, mocked the efforts of human skill, as much by their incapacity to prevent, as their inability to foresee it? Unmoved by the tears of conjugal affection, unawed by the presence of grandeur, and the prerogatives of power, inexorable Death hastened to execute his stern commission, leaving nothing to royalty itself, but to retire and weep. Who can fail to discern on this awful occasion, the hand of Him, who *bringeth princes to nothing, who maketh the judges of the earth as vanity; who says, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown; yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth; and he shall blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble?*

It is better, says Solomon, *to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting, for that is the*

end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart. While there are few who are not, at some season or other, conducted to that house, *a nation* enters it on the present visitation, there to learn, in the sudden extinction of the heiress of her monarchy, the vanity of all but what relates to eternity, and the absolute necessity of having our *loins girt, our lamps burning, and ourselves as those who are looking for the coming of the Bridegroom.*

We presume there are none who can survey this signal interposition of Providence with indifference, or refrain from "laying it to heart." No, illustrious Princess, it will be long ere the name of Charlotte Augusta is mentioned by Britons without tears: remote posterity also, which shall peruse thy melancholy story, will "lay it to heart," and will be tempted to ask, why no milder expedient could suffice to correct our levity, and make us mindful of our latter end; while they look back with tender pity on the amiable victim, who seems to have been destined by the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, to warn and edify that people by her death, which she was not permitted, to the extent of her ambition, to benefit by her life.

Should her lamented and untimely end be the means of giving that religious impulse to the public mind, which shall turn us to righteousness, the benefits she will have conferred upon her country, in both worlds, will more than equal the glories of the most prosperous and extended reign.

A SERMON

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF THE

REV. JOHN RYLAND, D.D.

PREACHED AT

THE BAPTIST MEETING, BROADMEAD, BRISTOL,

JUNE 5, 1825.

A SERMON.

JOHN xxi. 7.

That disciple whom Jesus loved.

IT has been alleged by unbelievers, as a defect in the morality of the gospel, that it neglects to inculcate patriotism and friendship. In regard to the first of these, it seems a sufficient reply, that though an attachment to our country as such, is not expressly enjoined in the New Testament, the duties which result from the relation in which christians stand to their rulers, are prescribed with great perspicuity, and enforced by very solemn sanctions; and if the reciprocal duties of princes and magistrates are not enjoined with equal explicitness, (as could not be expected in writings where they are not addressed), the design of their appointment is defined in such a manner, as leaves them at no loss to perceive what it is that they owe to the community. But where these duties are faithfully dicharged by each party, the benefits derived from the social compact are so justly appreciated, and so deeply felt, that the love of country is less liable to defect than to excess. In all well-ordered polities, if we may judge from the experience of past ages, the attachment of men to their country is in danger of becoming an absorbing principle, inducing not merely a forgetfulness of private interest, but of the immutable claims of humanity and justice. In the most virtuous times of the Roman republic, their country was the idol, at whose shrine her greatest patriots were at all times

prepared to offer whole hecatombs of human victims: the interests of other nations were no further regarded than as they could be rendered subservient to the gratification of her ambition; and mankind at large were considered as possessing no rights, but such as might with the utmost propriety be merged in that devouring vortex. With all their talents and their grandeur they were unprincipled oppressors, leagued in a determined conspiracy against the liberty and independence of mankind. In the eyes of an enlightened philanthropist, patriotism, pampered to such an excess, loses the name of virtue; it is the bond and cement of a guilty confederation. It was worthy of the wisdom of our great legislator to decline the express inculcation of a principle so liable to degenerate into excess, and to content himself with prescribing the virtues which are sure to develope it, as far as is consistent with the dictates of universal benevolence.

The second part of the objection to which we have alluded is susceptible of a similar answer. Let it be admitted, that our Lord did not formally prescribe the cultivation of friendship;—and what then? He prescribed the virtues out of which it will naturally grow; he prescribed the cultivation of benevolence in all its diversified modes of operation. In his personal ministry, and in that of his apostles, he enjoined humility, forbearance, gentleness, kindness, and the most tender sympathy with the infirmities and distresses of our fellow-creatures; and his whole life was a perfect transcript of these virtues. But these, in the ordinary course of events, and under the usual arrangements of Providence, are the best preparation for friendship, as well as the surest guarantee for the discharge of its duties, and the observation of its rights. For such is the secret affinity of mind to mind, such the social constitution of man, that he who is imbued with these dispositions can scarcely fail in the pilgrimage of life, to contract a friendship with one or more of his species. Accustomed to look upon the whole human family with a benign aspect, some members of it will attract more

of his attention, and awaken more of his complacency than others; where their virtues are equal, some more than ordinary congeniality of taste and temper will form a basis of preference, a motive for predilection, which, confirmed by habit, and strengthened by the reciprocal exchange of gratifying attentions and kind offices, will at length ripen into friendship. A mind habitually tender easily melts into softness, and exchanges the sentiments of esteem for those of specific attachment and endearment. What is friendship in virtuous minds but the concentration of benevolent emotions, heightened by respect and increased by exercise, on one or more objects? Friendship is not a state of feeling, whose elements are specifically different from those which compose every other. The emotions we feel towards a friend are the same in kind with those we experience on other occasions; but they are more complex and more exalted. It is the general sensibility to kind and social affections, more immediately directed to one or more individuals, and in consequence of its particular direction, giving birth to an order of feeling more vivid and intense than usual, which constitutes friendship. Hence we perceive the impropriety of making it the subject of legislation. It is the duty of every man to cultivate the dispositions which lead to friendship, the love of his species, admiration of virtue, regard to the feelings of others, gratitude, humility, along with the most inflexible adherence to probity and truth. Wherever these exist, friendship will be the natural result; but, it will result as a felicity rather than as a duty; and is to be placed among the rewards of virtue rather than its obligations. Happiness is not to be prescribed, but to be enjoyed; and such is the benevolent arrangement of Divine Providence, that wherever there is a moral preparation for it, it follows of course; and such are the pleasures and advantages derived from virtuous friendship. Its duties, supposing it to be formed, are deducible, with sufficient certainty and precision, from the light of nature and the precepts of scripture, and

none more sacred; but in the act of forming it, the mind disdains the fetters of prescriptions, and is left to be determined by the impulse of feeling, and the operation of events.

Besides, were friendship inculcated as a matter of indispensable obligation, endless embarrassments would arise in determining at what period the relation shall commence; whether with one or with more; and at what stage, in the progress of mutual attraction, at what point, the feelings of reciprocal regard shall be deemed to reach the maturity which entitles them to the sacred name of friendship. The laws of virtue and piety are coeval with our existence, considered as reasonable and accountable creatures. Their authority is founded on immutable relations, the duties resulting from which are capable of being clearly conceived and exactly defined; but he who should undertake to prescribe to the subtle and mysterious impulses which invite susceptible minds to friendship, would find himself engaged in an attempt as hopeless as to regulate the motions of the air which *bloweth where it listeth.*

But though the cultivation of friendship, for the reasons already assigned, is not made the subject of precept, but is left to grow up of itself under the general culture of reason and religion, it is one of the fairest productions of the human soil, the cordial of life, the lenitive of our sorrows, and the multiplier of our joys; the source equally of animation and of repose. He who is destitute of this blessing, amidst the great crowd and pressure of society, is doomed to solitude; and however surrounded with flatterers and admirers, however armed with power, and rich in the endowments of nature and of fortune, has no resting place. The most elevated station in life affords no exemption from those agitations and disquietudes which can only be laid to rest on the bosom of a friend.

The sympathies even of virtuous minds, when not warmed by the breath of friendship, are too faint and cold to satisfy the social cravings of our nature; their compassion is too much dissipated by the multiplicity of

its objects, and the varieties of distress, to suffer it to flow long in one channel; while the sentiments of congratulation are still more slight and superficial. A transient tear of pity, or a smile of complacency equally transient, is all we can usually bestow on the scenes of happiness or of misery which we meet with in the paths of life. But man naturally seeks for a closer union, a more permanent conjunction of interests, a more intense reciprocation of feeling; he finds the want of one or more with whom he can trust the secrets of his heart, and relieve himself by imparting the interior joys and sorrows with which every human breast is fraught. He seeks, in short, another self, a kindred spirit, whose interest in his welfare bears some proportion to his own, with whom he may lessen his cares by sympathy, and multiply his pleasures by participation.

The satisfaction derived from surveying the most beautiful scenes of nature, or the most exquisite productions of art, is so far from being complete, that it almost turns into uneasiness when there is none with whom we can share it; nor would the most passionate admirer of eloquence or poetry consent to witness their most stupendous exertions, upon the simple condition of not being permitted to reveal his emotions. So essential an ingredient in felicity is friendship, apart from the more solid and permanent advantages it procures, and when viewed in no other light than as the organ of communication, the channel of feeling and of thought. But if joy itself is a burden which the heart can ill sustain, without inviting others to partake of it, how much more the corrosions of anxiety, the perturbations of fear, and the dejection arising from sudden and overwhelming calamity!

But it is not merely as a source of pleasure, or as a relief from pain, that virtuous friendship is to be coveted; it is at least as much recommended by its utility. He who has made the acquisition of a judicious and sympathizing friend, may be said to have doubled his mental resources: by associating an equal, perhaps a superior mind, with his own, he has provided the means of strengthening his reason, of perfecting his counsels, of

discerning and correcting his errors. He can have recourse at all times to the judgement and assistance of one, who with the same power of discernment with himself, comes to the decision of a question with a mind neither harassed with the perplexities, nor heated with the passions, which so frequently obscure the perception of our true interests. Next to the immediate guidance of God by his Spirit, the counsel and encouragement of virtuous and enlightened friends afford the most powerful aid, in the encounter of temptation and in the career of duty.

Wisdom indeed is not confined to any limited circle, much less to the very narrow one of private friendship, and sound advice may often be procured from those with whom we have contracted no ties of intimacy. But the patient attention required to comprehend and encounter all the peculiarities of the case; the persevering ardour, the persuasive sympathy, necessary to invest it with authority and to render it effectual, will be wanting; in the absence of which, the wisest counsel is a wintry and sickly beam, which plays on the surface only: it may enlighten, but will seldom penetrate or melt. The consciousness, too, of possessing a share in the esteem and affection of persons of distinguished worth is a powerful support to every virtuous resolution; it sheds a warm and cheerful light over the paths of life; fortifies the breast against unmanly dejection and pusillanimous fears; while the apprehension of forfeiting these advantages, presents a strong resistance to the encroachments of temptation. There are higher considerations, it is true, which ought invariably to produce the same effect; but we have no such superfluity of strength, as should induce us to decline the aid of inferior motives, when all are but barely adequate to the exigencies of our state. The recollection that we are acting under the eye of Omniscience will lose nothing of its force by being joined to the remembrance, that our conduct is subject to the scrutiny of friends, whose sentiments are in unison, whose influence coincides with the voice of conscience and of God. And surely it must be no contemptible

aid in the discharge of his duties, which he derives, who has invited the benevolent inspection of his actions, the honest reprehension of his errors, and the warm encouragement of his virtues; who, accustomed to lay open the interior of his character, and the most retired secrets of his heart, finds, in the approbation of his friend, the suffrage of his conscience reflected and confirmed; who delighted, but not elated, by the esteem he has secured and the confidence he has won, advances with renovated vigour in the paths that lead to glory, honour, and immortality. The pleasures resulting from the mutual attachment of kindred spirits are by no means confined to the moments of personal intercourse; they diffuse their odours, though more faintly, through the seasons of absence; refreshing and exhilarating the mind by the remembrance of the past, and the anticipation of the future. It is a treasure possessed when it is not employed; a reserve of strength, ready to be called into action when most needed; a fountain of sweets, to which we may continually repair, whose waters are inexhaustible.

Friendship, founded on the principles of worldly morality, recognized by virtuous heathens, such as that which subsisted between Atticus and Cicero, which the last of these illustrious men has rendered immortal, is fitted to survive through all the vicissitudes of life; but it belongs only to a union founded on religion, to continue through an endless duration. The former of these stood the shock of conflicting opinions, and of a revolution that shook the world; the latter is destined to survive when the heavens are no more, and to spring fresh from the ashes of the universe. The former possessed all the stability which is possible to sublunary things; the latter partakes of the eternity of God. Friendship founded on worldly principles is *natural*, and, though composed of the best elements of nature, is not exempt from its mutability and frailty; the latter is *spiritual*, and therefore unchanging and imperishable. The friendship which is founded on kindred tastes and congenial habits, apart from piety, is permitted by the benignity of

Providence to embellish a world which, with all its magnificence and beauty, will shortly pass away; that which has religion for its basis will ere long be transplanted in order to adorn the paradise of God.

But it is time to turn our attention to the passage selected for our present meditations: *that disciple whom Jesus loved.* This is not the only instance in which the writer of this history designates himself under that character; whence we may with certainty infer, that the preference shown him by our Lord, above the other apostles, was so notorious, that the mention of it, even by the person on whom it was bestowed, could occasion no offence. He had recourse to it, without doubt, from a dictate of modesty, that he might avoid the disagreeable necessity of often speaking of himself under his proper name. It is natural to feel some curiosity respecting the character of one who was the object of so distinguished a preference. Are we to impute it to a decided superiority in intellectual and moral attainments? Perhaps not. The consideration of moral worth will always enter deeply into the motives which actuate wise and good men in their choice of friends; but it is far from constituting the only one. A certain congeniality of mind and manners, aided by the operation of adventitious circumstances, contributes a principal share towards the formation of such unions; nor is it presumption to conjecture that, in the instance before us, there was something in the taste and disposition of our Lord, considered as a man, more in unison with those of John than with any of the other apostles. As every character has its peculiar mould, by which it is more or less distinguished, we may be allowed to suppose, that in addition to the possession of unrivalled excellence in general, that of our Lord was marked by certain discriminating features. The virtues of Elijah, which reappeared in John the Baptist,—stern, awful, and majestic,—fitted to alarm a slumbering world by a denunciation of the wrath to come: how different the aspect they wear, from those of *the man of sorrows*, who wept at the grave of Lazarus! We follow the footsteps of this greatest of

prophets with a reverence bordering upon terror; while we behold, in the character of our Lord, though transcendently superior, such a meek and softened majesty, that we are not surprised that he who knew him best, delighted to designate him under the appellation of *the Lamb.* The distinguishing features of our Lord's character, viewed as a perfect human being, were, unquestionably, humility and love; nor is it less certain, or less obvious, that these were the qualities most conspicuous in the character of the beloved disciple.

This apostle presents a striking contrast to a certain class of writers, who, by no means deficient in talent, but possessing little sensibility, afford the reader little or no insight into their character. Their conceptions and their language are cast into a certain artificial mould, which leaves scarcely any traces of individuality. The writings of John are of the most contrary description; they are replete with traits of character; the writer presents his heart in almost every page. A tender sensibility pervades his gospel, sufficient to distinguish it from either of the preceding; nor is it possible to believe, that the narrative of the resurrection of Lazarus, or of the last scenes of our Saviour's life, were composed without tears.

Such strokes of pathos, such touching simplicity, such minuteness of detail, without puerility or redundance, characterize the history of these extraordinary events, as could only have proceeded from one who felt himself a party concerned; who, with a most intimate acquaintance with his subject, wrote still more from his heart than from his head. He is little to be envied, who can peruse these inimitable narratives without being moved. The author places us in the very midst of the scenes he describes; we listen to the discourses, we imbibe the sentiments of the principal actors; and while he says nothing of himself, he lays open the whole interior of his character. We feel ourselves introduced, not so much to the acquaintance of an inspired apostle, as to that of the most amiable of men.

The selection of his materials is such as it were natural to expect from *the disciple whom Jesus loved;*

for, while the other evangelists direct their chief attention to the miracles of our Lord, John relates his sentiments and discourses. The preceding evangelists content themselves, for the most part, with exhibiting his human history, in the record of those facts which established the truth of his doctrine, and the divinity of his mission; John commences from an earlier date, draws back the veil of eternity, and shows us the subject of his history subsisting before all worlds, presiding in the work of creation and providence.

It is from this apostle we learn most fully the state of the controversy between our Lord and the unbelieving Jews; in the course of which, we have continual occasion to admire the quickness and dexterity, the subtlety and profundity, displayed in various discourses, which, but for him, would have been lost in oblivion. He expatiates with peculiar interest on the last interview between Christ and his disciples; where he assures them of his unalterable attachment, and exerts himself to console their grief, to reanimate their confidence, and dispel their fears, by the prospect of seeing them again, when their joy should be such as *no man should take from them.* He either entirely omits, or passes rapidly over, the transactions recorded by the other evangelists; but when he approaches the scene of the crucifixion, he lingers, and dwells upon the circumstances of that awful tragedy with a minuteness and particularity of detail, as though it had never been recorded before.

In the short epistles inscribed with his name, the topic on which he chiefly insists is LOVE, which, in its sublimer form, constitutes the moral essence of the Deity, as well as the very sum and substance of true religion. His heart was in perfect unison with his subject. Written, as is supposed, at a very advanced age, the spirit they breathe is that of a father inculcating on his children the cultivation of every virtue, and especially of mutual affection, with that neglect of order and arrangement, and those reiterations and overflowings of tender importunity, which are suited to such a character. Instead of assuming an air of superiority, in his first epistle he

suppresses his name; and in the two last, takes to himself a title common to every christian pastor. He is not satisfied with styling his converts children; he styles them little children. *Little children, keep yourselves from idols;* which reminds me of a beautiful anecdote related by Eusebius, that when he was too much oppressed with infirmity to permit him to exercise his public ministry any longer, he was accustomed to be carried into the church; and after stretching forth his feeble arms, and crying, *Little children, love one another,* to retire from the assembly. So deeply was he imbued with the seraphic love of the bosom on which he leaned, that it remained unimpaired, amidst the decays of nature, and the eclipse of intellect.

In the early part of his life, if we may judge from a single incident, from his proposing to call down fire from heaven to avenge the insult offered to our Lord, he possessed an impetuous and eager spirit, not always restrained by *the wisdom that is from above;* but in maturer years it appears to have subsided, and given place to none but benign affections. His meekness and tenderness, however, were never indulged at the expense of truth, his adherence to which was inviolable; nor did he fail to express the utmost abhorrence at any attempt to corrupt it; insomuch that I can easily believe another anecdote related by Eusebius, that, on his entering a public bath, and finding the notorious heresiarch Cerinthus there, he left it with precipitation, exclaiming, "Let us flee from this place, lest it fall and crush that enemy of God!" His benevolence spent itself, not in a hollow and unmeaning complaisance to the impugners of the gospel, but in efforts to convert them; and just in proportion as he loved his fellow-creatures, was his anxiety to preserve, unimpaired, and unmixed, the doctrine by which they were to be saved.

But enough has been said on the character of this eminent apostle. Before we dismiss this branch of our subject, it will be proper to advert to a few indications of the preference with which he was honoured. On perusing the evangelists, it appears, that he was in-

variably selected by our Lord as one of the three, who were present in the most retired scenes of his life, on the mount of transfiguration, in the house of Jairus, and in the garden of Gethsemane. Whoever else were absent, John was sure to share his most confidential moments, and to witness his most secret joys and conflicts. At the paschal supper, to which he looked forward with so much eagerness, as the appointed season for a more unreserved disclosure of his purposes than he had made before, he placed John next to himself, in such a manner, that his head naturally rested on his bosom. Through him it was that the rest of the disciples applied to our Lord to be informed who it was that should betray him. But the most decisive evidence of the preference bestowed upon John, arises from his being chosen to take care of his widowed mother after his decease. The circumstance is related with inimitable simplicity and beauty. No sooner was our Saviour elevated on the cross, than he sees his mother standing by, along with *the disciple whom he loved:* to the mother he said, *Behold thy son;* to John, *Behold thy mother: and from that moment John took her to his own house.* What a rebuke to that proud and false philosophy, which pretends to extinguish the feelings of nature, and to erect its trophies on the ruins of humanity! By committing to the beloved disciple so precious a deposit, he gave him a stronger demonstration of his esteem than by a whole volume of panegyric.

After the resurrection and ascension, he continued to receive from his Saviour similar proofs of his preference. Preserved amidst a violent and bloody persecution, he was permitted (such is the universal tradition of the church) to survive the rest of the apostles, to witness, in the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of its inhabitants, the fulfilment of his own predictions, and, finally, to close a life extended to an extreme old age in peace, and in the bosom of his friends. Nor was this the only distinction he enjoyed. To him it was given to convey to the churches of Asia among whom he dwelt, repeated messages from his ascended Lord, to behold his

glory, and to catch the last accents of inspiration. To him it was given, not only to record the life of the Saviour, in common with the other evangelists; but to transmit to future ages the principal events and vicissitudes which shall befall the church to the end of time, in a series of visions, which revived the spirit and manner, and more than equalled the sublimity, of the ancient prophets. Endowed with a genius equally simple and sublime, he mingles with ease among the worshippers before the throne, communes with beings of the highest order, and surveys the splendours of the celestial temple with an eye that never blenched. The place which he occupies in the order and succession of inspired men, must at the same time ensure to him a high distinction; for while Moses leads the way, John brings up the rear of that illustrious company.

To the selection of the passage to which your attention is directed, I was led by an irresistible impulse the moment I heard of the melancholy event which has deprived you of your beloved pastor. It appeared to me peculiarly applicable to his character, nor am I apprehensive of encountering contradiction, when I affirm, that among his numerous acquaintance, an entire unanimity will be felt on this subject. It will be readily confessed, that his piety was of the same mould and complexion with that which distinguished the beloved disciple. In the attempt I shall make to delineate his character, let me not be suspected of the presumption of attempting to impart any information to *you*, on whose minds his virtues have made that indelible impression which is far above the power of words. It is solely for the use of those who were placed beyond the influence of his example and the benefit of his instructions, that it appears to me not improper to exhibit some of the more conspicuous features which contributed to render him so eminent a pattern of christian excellence.

It is a homage due to departed worth, whenever it rises to such a height as to render its possessor an object of general attention, to endeavour to rescue it from oblivion; that when it is removed from the observation

of men, it may still live in their memory and transmit through the shades of the sepulchre some reflection, however faint, of its living lustre. By enlarging the cloud of witnesses by which we are encompassed, it is calculated to give a fresh impulse to the desire of imitation; and even the despair of reaching it is not without its use, by checking the levity, and correcting the pride and presumption of the human heart.

Doctor Ryland was born January 29, 1753, at Warwick, where his venerable father exercised his ministry for some years; from whence he removed to Northampton.

The most remarkable particular recorded of his infancy is his early progress in the Hebrew language, which was such, that he read a chapter of the Hebrew Bible to the celebrated Hervey, when he was only five years old. About his thirteenth year, he became deeply impressed with religious concern; and without any thing very singular in his experience, his convictions ripened into genuine conversion, and he was baptized on a profession of his faith in his fourteenth year. At the request of the church he began to exercise his ministerial gifts in his seventeenth year; and after continuing to assist his father for some years, he was ordained co-pastor with him in the year 1781. In this situation he remained for some time; when, on his father's removal from Northampton, he became sole pastor, until the year 1793, when he received a unanimous invitation to the joint offices of president of the Bristol Education Society, and pastor of Broadmead. How he conducted himself in the first scene of his labours, many living witnesses can attest; suffice it to say, that his ministry during that period was eminently acceptable and useful. During his residence at Northampton, he was *in labours more abundant;* far from confining his ministry to a single spot, he diffused its benefits over a wide circle, preaching much in the surrounding villages; and though, on his removal to Bristol, his numerous avocations rendered his ministerial exertions less frequent, he may justly be

considered, on the whole, as one of the most laborious of pastors. He preached, during his whole career, not less than eight thousand six hundred and ninety-one sermons, and at two hundred and eighty-six distinct places.

If, as a preacher, he never attained the highest summit of popularity, he was always heard with attention. His ministry was replete with instruction, and not unfrequently accompanied with an unction which rendered it irresistible. As he possessed none of those graces of elocution and manner which secure superficial applause, he was always most esteemed by those who heard him the oftenest; and his stated hearers rarely, if ever, wished to exchange the voice of their pastor for that of a stranger. His address was such as produced an instantaneous conviction of his sincerity. It displayed, even to the most superficial observer, a mind infinitely above being actuated by the lust of applause; a spirit deeply imbued with a sense of eternal realities, and ready to pour itself forth as a libation on the sacrifice of the faith and obedience of his converts. The effect of his discourses, excellent as they were in themselves, was prodigiously heightened by the veneration universally felt for his character, and the just and high estimation entertained of his piety. Piety, indeed, was his distinguished characteristic, which he possessed to a degree that raised him inconceivably beyond the level of ordinary christians. Devotion appeared to be the principal element of his being: it was next to impossible to converse with him without perceiving how entirely it pervaded his mind, and imparted to his whole deportment an air of purity, innocence, and sanctity, difficult for words to express. His piety did not display itself in a profusion of religious discourse, nor in frequently alluding to the interior exercises of his mind on spiritual subjects. He was seldom known to speak of his religious joys or sorrows: his devotional feelings were too deep and too sacred to suffer themselves to evaporate in ordinary conversation. His religion appeared in its fruits; in gentleness, humility, and benevolence; in a steady, conscientious performance of every duty; and a careful abstinence from every appearance of evil.

As little did his character partake of the ascetic. It never entered into his thoughts that religion was an enemy to the innocent pleasures and social endearments of human life, of which he entertained a high relish, and which his constant regard to the Deity rendered subservient to piety, by the gratitude which they inspired, and the conviction which they deepened of the divine benignity. His love to the Great Supreme was equally exempt from slavish timidity and presumptuous familiarity: it was an awful love, such as the beatific vision may be supposed to inspire, where the worshippers veil their faces in that presence in which they rejoice with ecstatic joy. As he cherished a firm persuasion that the attributes of the Deity ensure the production of the greatest possible sum of good, in comparison of which the quantity of natural and moral evil permitted to remain, vanishes and disappears, his views of the divine administration were a source of unmingled joy; while his profound sense of the essential holiness and justice of the Supreme Ruler, kept alive those sentiments of penitence and humility to which too many *optimists* are strangers. *He feared the great and terrible name of the Lord his God.*

Humility was, in fact, the most remarkable feature of his character. It was depicted on his countenance, his manners, his language; it pervaded almost every thing he said or did. He might most truly be said, in the language of scripture, to be *clothed* with it. The mode in which it operated was at the utmost remove from the shallow expedients adopted by those who vainly attempt to secure the praise of that quality, without possessing it. It neither prompted him to depreciate his talents, nor to disclaim his virtues; to speak in debasing terms of himself, nor to exaggerate his imperfections and failings. It taught him the rarer art of forgetting himself. His readiness to take the lowest place, could only be exceeded by the eagerness of all who knew him to assign him the highest; and this was the only competition which the distinctions of life ever cost him. His modesty was such, that the praises he was most solicitous

to merit he blushed to receive; and never appeared so disconcerted and embarrassed, as when he was necessitated to hear his own commendations. Hence it will be easily inferred, that he was completely exempt from the jealousy of superior talent or reputation; that it gave him not a moment's uneasiness to find himself eclipsed, and that he was the ardent admirer and panegyrist of the mental endowments in which he was most deficient. Though he had neglected to cultivate the powers of his imagination, and was little distinguished for the graces of style, no one was ever more disposed to admire them wherever they were conspicuous. The candour and benignity of his mind prepared him to embrace every kind of intellectual superiority, to rejoice in every display of talent, devoted to the interest of religion; and to derive exquisite gratification from the operation of those qualities and powers to which he made the least pretensions. His enjoyment of intellectual repast was not impaired by the consciousness of not having contributed to furnish it: and his virtue was thus his own reward, by enabling him to reap the harvest, where he neither sowed the seed, nor prepared the soil.

If any man ever practised the gentleness of Jesus Christ, it was certainly our lamented friend. Possessed of a temper naturally quick and irritable, he had, by the aid of reason and religion, so far subdued that propensity, that it was rarely suffered to appear, and when it did, it was a momentary agitation which quickly subsided into kindness and benignity. His sensibility was exquisite. There were a numerous class of subjects to which he could rarely advert without tears. The bare recurrence to his mind of the great objects of religion, was sufficient to produce a gush of tenderness; so entirely was his heart softened, that it might be truly styled *a heart of flesh.* Nor was his sensibility confined to religion. It pervaded the whole system of his life, producing a quick and powerful sympathy; not only with his own species, but with the whole circle of animated nature, the properties of which he took great delight in investigating, and in tracing the

exquisite contrivance of its benevolent Author for its preservation and enjoyment.

His extreme susceptibility of feeling, combined with his gentleness and timidity, necessarily exposed him to be wounded, whenever he encountered harsh and unfeeling manners; and from the same cause he was liable to be hurt by every symptom of unkindness, even where none was intended. His sensitive mind was impressed with every variety of temper in those with whom he conversed; and if his peace was less frequently invaded from this quarter than might have been expected, it is to be ascribed to that reverence which his character so universally inspired. It seemed a sort of sacrilege to trespass upon so much innocence and piety.

And here I cannot but remark, that, though religion in its ordinary mode of exhibition commands but little respect; when it rises to the sublime, and is perceived to tincture and pervade the whole character, it seldom fails to draw forth the homage of mankind. The most hardened impiety and daring profligacy will find it difficult to despise the man who manifestly appears to walk with God, whose whole system of life is evidently influenced and directed by the powers of the world to come. The ridicule cast on religious characters, is not always directed towards their religion, but more often, perhaps to the little it performs, contrasted with the loftiness of its pretensions; a ridicule which derives its force from the very sublimity of the principles which the profession of piety assumes. It may be doubted whether the character of Dr. Ryland provoked, on any occasion, the sneer of the infidel, or the scorn of the ungodly.

The opportunities of making great sacrifices for the good of mankind, are of rare occurrence, and he who remains inactive till it is in his power to confer signal benefits, or yield important services, is in imminent danger of incurring the doom of the slothful servant. It is the preference of duty to inclination, in the ordinary course of life, it is the practice of self-denial in a thousand little instances, which forms the truest test of cha-

racter, and secures the honour and the reward of those who *live not to themselves.* Viewed in this light, our lamented friend presented a pattern of christian virtue, rarely, if ever, surpassed. His whole life was a series of acts of self-denial; his conduct appeared invariably to proceed from the impulse of benevolence and the sense of duty; and though not exempt from the errors and imperfections incident to the present state, his *eye was always single*, his intentions always upright. If the essence of christian perfection consists in a sole and supreme desire to do the will of God, he probably made as near an approach to it as is attainable in the present state; though he not only never pretended to it, but held all such pretensions in abhorrence.

Justice to his memory will not permit me to suppress the mention of that strict and inviolable regard to truth which he preserved in all his words and actions. He would never allow himself to employ those exaggerations and colours in the narration of facts, which many who would shudder at a deliberate falsehood freely indulge; some for the gratification of their passions, or the advancement of their interests, and others purely from the impulse of vanity, and a wish to render their narratives more striking, and their conversation more poignant. Whatever Dr. Ryland affirmed was, as far as his knowledge extended, as certain as an identical proposition; nor was he satisfied with the substantial truth of what he asserted; he was so anxious that the impression he conveyed should exactly coincide, as well in its degree, as in kind, with his internal conviction, that, if it be possible, he was too tenacious of truth, and may be said to have carried his scrupulosity too far. I have often been amused at observing the compass he would fetch, and the circumlocutions he would have recourse to, in the narration of facts, rather than incur the possibility of misrepresentation or mistake.

Few men have exhibited more unequivocal proofs of candour than your excellent and lamented pastor. Though a Calvinist, in the strictest sense of the word, and attached to its peculiarities in a higher degree than

most of the advocates of that system, he extended his affection to all who bore the image of Christ, and was ingenious in discovering reasons for thinking well of many who widely dissented from his religious views. No man was more remarkable for combining a zealous attachment to his own principles with the utmost liberality of mind towards those who differed from him; an abhorrence of error, with the kindest feelings towards the erroneous. He detested the spirit of monopoly in religion, and opposed every tendency to circumscribe it by the limits of party. His treatise on Baptism furnishes a beautiful specimen of the manner in which religious controversy should be conducted on a subject on which the combatants on both sides have frequently disgraced themselves by an acrimony and bitterness, in an inverse proportion to the importance of the point in debate. How extraordinary is it, that they who differ only on one subject, and that, confessedly of secondary moment, should have contended with more fierceness than has usually been displayed in a contest *pro aris et focis*, for all that is dear and important in christianity! Is it that their near approach as religious denominations, exposes them more to the spirit of rivalry, as adjoining kingdoms are the most hostile to each other, or that it is the property of bigotry to acquire an additional degree of malignity by being concentrated on one point, and directed to one object? Whatever the cause may be, the fact is singular and greatly to be lamented. He whose removal from us we so deeply regret, was too thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Christ, to expose him to that snare; his love of good men of every nation, sect, and party, was fervent and disinterested, nor was it confined to the bounds of his personal knowledge; it engaged him in a most affectionate and extensive correspondence with eminent persons in remote quarters of the globe, whose faces he never saw; so signally was he prepared for sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, where the whole assembly of the church of the first-born will be convened before the throne of God and the Lamb

In addition to his other excellencies, none, who were honoured with his intimacy, will fail to recollect his diligence in the improvement of time, of the value of which he entertained too deep a sense, to allow any part of it to run to waste. By the practice of early rising, and a most exact distribution of his hours to their respective employments, he contrived to husband a treasure, which no one is permitted to squander without severely repenting it, though that repentance may possibly arrive too late. Employing every day as if it were the last, and subjecting every portion of time to a religious regulation, he *worked out his salvation with fear and trembling.* From taste, as well as from principle, he was warmly attached to order and method, which he extended to the minutest particulars. Thus the transactions of his whole life lay before him, by looking back on the turns and vicissitudes of which, he was accumulating fresh materials for gratitude, and acquiring new lessons of prudence and piety.

That with all this varied excellence he united some imperfections, will be readily allowed; at the same time it is but justice to remark, that they were in the strictest sense of the word *imperfections*, since they grew out of his natural temperament, and were not to be imputed to an obliquity of will, or to a deficiency in the strength of his moral principle. The most conspicuous of these was a certain timidity of spirit, a proneness to augur danger where none existed, which, from an excessive apprehension of doing evil, sometimes arrested his power of doing good. His caution was extreme, and his natural aversion to bold and hazardous measures, on some occasions, enervated his resolutions, and crippled his efforts. Alive to the possible inconvenience resulting from an unnecessary disclosure of his views, he narrowed his confidence too much, lost the advantage of that assistance and cooperation which he might easily have commanded, and in some of the most trying exigencies of his life, doomed himself to walk alone. It must be also acknowledged by his warmest admirers, that he was deficient in the spirit of authority, that he wanted the

power of asserting his rights, of repressing the encroachments of petulance, and of sustaining his pretensions to rule. The extreme gentleness of his character was such that it left him too much to the mercy of those who were conscious they might abuse it, without danger of incurring his resentment. He not only carried with him no *offensive*, but he had no *defensive*, armour. This want of force and energy of character, which was his chief imperfection, was not, there is reason to believe, entirely natural, but to be ascribed, in a great measure, to an injudicious mode of treatment in early life, and to some severe trials in the commencement of his career, which pressed with such force on his mind, that it never entirely recovered its elasticity. He witnessed in his excellent father an excess of vehemence, a careless intrepidity of temper, that, with the most upright intentions, involved him in so much distress, that his anxiety to avoid that extreme betrayed him into a contrary one. The grand maxim which he seems to have adopted for the regulation of his life, was a determination to shun every approach to what he had seen productive of so much inconvenience, forgetting, perhaps, too much, that the opposite to that which is wrong, is not always right. Hence the fear of consequences predominated too much in his course of action, and he was more easily deterred by the apprehension of possible evil, than incited to action by the prospect of good. In the words of an ingenious writer, employed on a different occasion "*there was nothing he needed to be cautioned against, so much as caution itself.*"*

I am aware there are those who have charged our excellent friend with a want of openness of character. As far as such an imputation has any colour of truth, it is but just to remark, that the deficiency complained of was in no degree tinctured with dissimulation or cunning. It was partly the effect of that timidity which he was acknowledged to possess, partly of that gentleness which shrunk with an instinctive recoil from contention, and

* See Morris's "Life of Fuller," a work which contains a most able and accurate delineation of the character of that extraordinary man.

which disposed him, however his feelings might be wounded, to breathe out his complaints in the ear of friendship, rather than demand such an explanation or apology as might have restored confidence, and prevented a repetition of the offence. He repressed his anger, but indulged his grief; and was accustomed on such occasions to conduct himself rather like a person wounded than offended. Thus the uneasy sensations, with which his mind was fraught were allowed to accumulate, producing not malignity indeed or rancour, of which he was incapable, but permanent disgust. *Be ye angry*, saith the Scripture, *and sin not*. A violent suppression of the natural feelings is not the best expedient for obviating their injurious effects, and though nothing requires a more vigilant restraint than the emotions of anger, the uneasiness of which it is productive, is, perhaps, best evaporated by its natural and temperate expression; not to say that it is a wise provision in the economy of nature for the repression of injury, and the preservation of the peace and decorum of society.

Such, and such only, as it appears to me, was the origin of that reserve, which forms the most plausible objection to his character, and which, when closely investigated, will be considered more as an infelicity than a fault. That it contributed to render him less influential, less powerful, and totally disqualified him to be the head of a party, will be readily admitted, but it may be doubted whether it rendered him much less amiable. The worst effect of it was, that it sometimes imparted to his conduct the semblance of disingenuous concealment, while he was in reality an example of artless simplicity. For the liberty I have assumed of alluding to the imperfections of our lamented friend, my only apology is, that unqualified praise is entitled to little credit, and that the failings which attach to the character of the best of men are often as instructive as their virtues.

It may be expected that something should be said of his literary character and attainments, a circumstance not to be neglected, in speaking of the president of a theo-

logical institute. My knowledge, however, on this head, is too limited to allow me to say more, than that he was a scholar from his infancy, that his attainments in the Hebrew language were profound, that he had a general acquaintance with the principles of science, and that his reading was various and extensive. As he was extremely addicted to study and meditation, so his mental opulence was much greater than his modesty would permit him to reveal; his disposition to conceal his attainments being nearly as strong as that of some men to display them.

He had a passion for natural history, in the pursuit of which he was much assisted by the peculiar structure of his eyes, which were a kind of natural microscopes. The observations he made on various natural productions, without the aid of instruments, were really surprising; and though the peculiarity in his visual organs deprived him of the pleasure of contemplating the sublime and magnificent features of nature, it gave him a singular advantage for tracing her minuter operations.

But the science in which he most delighted, and to which he bent the full force of his mind, was theology: not that theology which is built on human speculation, and supported by scholastic subtleties, but that knowlege of God, and of the mysteries of his will, which shone in the face of Jesus Christ. By the incessant study of the Scriptures, your pastor became a *scribe well instructed for the kingdom of God, and, like a wise householder, was enabled to bring forth out of his treasure things new and old.* The system of divinity to which he adhered was moderate Calvinism, as modelled and explained by that prodigy of metaphysical acumen, the celebrated Jonathan Edwards. For the writings of this great man, and those of his followers, he formed a warm predilection very early, which continued ever after to exert a powerful influence on his public ministry, as well as his theological inquiries and pursuits. It inspired him with the most elevated conceptions of the moral character of the Deity, to the display of which it taught him to refer the whole economy of providence and of grace, while he inculcated the indispensable duty of

loving God, not merely for the benefits he bestows, but for what he is in himself, as essential to true religion. Hence, he held in abhorrence those pretended religious affections which have their origin and termination in *self.* Whether he attached an undue importance to these speculations, and rendered them occasionally too prominent in his public ministrations, it is not for me to determine; it is certain that they effectually secured him from the slightest tendency to Antinomianism, and contributed not a little to give purity and elevation to his religious views. The two extremes against which you are well aware he was most solicitous to guard the religious public, were, Pelagian pride, and Antinomian licentiousness; the first of which he detested as an insult on the grace of the gospel; the last, on the majesty and authority of the law.

By the removal of a minister of Christ, so able, so disinterested, so devoted, you have sustained a loss, the magnitude of which it is difficult to appreciate, much more to repair. A successor you may easily procure, but where will you find one who will so *naturally care for your state?* who, *instant in season and out of season, is willing to impart to you not only the gospel, but his own soul also, because ye are dear unto him?* You may hear the same truths from other lips, supported by illustrations and arguments equally clear and cogent; the same duties inculcated by similar motives; but where will you find them enforced and recommended by an example equally elevated, an affection equally tender? Where will you look for another, whose whole life is a luminous commentary on his doctrine, and who can invite you to no heights of piety but what you are conscious he has himself attained? When you add to this the effect of a residence among you of above thirty years, during which he became the confidential friend of your parents, the guide of your youth, and after witnessing the removal of one generation to a better world, was the honoured instrument of raising up another in their room; when you reflect on the continued emanations of wisdom and piety which proceeded for so long a space from this burning

and shining light, you must be convinced that your loss is irreparable.*

The removal of such a pastor, of one whose labours you have so long enjoyed, is an epoch in the history of a church. It is an event which no living generation can witness more than once; and it surely calls upon you to consider what improvement you have made of such advantages, and what is the prospect that awaits you, in the final day of account, when you and your pastor shall meet once more in the presence of the Judge; he to give an account of his ministry, you of its effect on your character. In relation to him, the event is not doubtful. *He has finished his course, he has kept the faith; henceforth there remains for him a crown of righteousness, which Christ the righteous judge will give him on that day.* Would to God the issue were equally certain and equally happy on the part of those, who so long enjoyed the benefit of such a ministry! That such will be the issue with respect to many who compose this auditory, we cannot doubt; and with what inconceivable joy will he witness the felicity which awaits them, while he presents them before the throne, saying, *Here am I, and the children which thou hast given me!* With what delight will they renew the intercourse which death had interrupted, and retrace together the steps of their mysterious pilgrimage! while the gratitude they will experience towards him who was instrumental in conducting them thither, will be only inferior to that which they will feel to God and the Lamb. How trivial will every other distinction then appear, compared to the honour of having turned many to righteousness! of having sown that seed which shall be reaped in life everlasting! A large portion of this felicity will, we cannot doubt, accrue to your pastor, from those who are accustomed to assemble within these walls; but should it in any instance be otherwise, should the event be of a

* The church wisely sought for a successor to their excellent pastor in the author of this discourse, who removed from Leicester to Bristol in the spring of 1826; but whose admirable labours there were terminated by death within five years.—Ed.

contrary nature, he *will be a sweet smelling savour to God*, even *in them that perish.* His happiness will be unimpaired, his reward undiminished, and the feelings with which he was wont to contemplate such a catastrophe will give place to sentiments of a higher order. The tears which he here wept over souls in danger of perishing will be shed no more; all his agitation and anxiety, on their account, will be laid to rest; nor will they who refused to constitute his joy by their conversion, be suffered to mar his felicity by their destruction.

It is not the church and congregation only, over which he presided with so much honour, that feels itself interested in this event. The sensation which it has produced is widely extended, and has reached every part of this great and populous city; a city sufficiently enlightened to comprehend his worth, and to mourn his loss. When a Reynolds, whose munificence flowed in a thousand channels, and whose example gave a new impulse to the public mind, quitted the scene which he had so long adorned with his presence, and enriched with his bounty, that a general sensation should be excited, is no more than might be expected. But that the removal of a christian minister, who possessed none of these advantages, should produce a regret so universal and so deep, is a pleasing homage to the majesty of religion; a practical demonstration of the power it exerts over the consciences of men. If blessings are bestowed and judgements averted in answer to prayer, as the Scripture every where teaches, and the efficacy of prayer is proportioned to the fervour of faith and the perfection of obedience, it is impossible to say how much the inhabitants of this place may be indebted to our excellent friend, by whose removal they have lost a powerful intercessor with God!

By an extensive circle of ministers and churches, who shared his friendship, and on various occasions enjoyed his labours, his loss will be deeply lamented, and not without reason; for, though the faithful dispensers of evangelical instruction may now be reckoned by thousands, how few are left who can sustain a comparison

with him, in all the qualities which adorn the gospel, and give the possessor power with God.

That denomination of Christians, of which he was so long a distinguished ornament, will especially lay this providence to heart. Our hands are weakened this day; and if the glory is not departed from us, it is at least eclipsed and obscured. We have been visited with stroke upon stroke. Our brightest lights have been successively extinguished; and in vain do we look around for a Beddome, a Booth, a Fuller, or a Ryland; names which would have given lustre to any denomination, and were long the glory of ours. Your pastor was endeared to us, as one of the last links of the chain which connected the present generation with the founders of the Baptist Mission. From the very beginning, he mingled his counsels and his prayers with that determined band, who, in the absence of all human resources, resolved to send the gospel to the remotest quarter of the globe; nor did he cease to his last hour to watch over its progress with parental solicitude. The intimate friendship which subsisted between that lovely triumvirate, Fuller, Ryland, and Sutcliff, which never suffered a moment's interruption or abatement, was cemented by their common attachment to that object. Of congenial sentiments and taste, though of very different temperament and character, there was scarce a thought which they did not communicate to each other, while they united all their energies in supporting the same cause; nor is it easy to determine whether the success of our mission is most to be ascribed to the vigour of Fuller, the prudence of Sutcliff, or the piety of Ryland. Is it presumption to suppose, they still turn their attention to that object? that they bend their eyes on the plains of Hindostan, and sympathize with the toils of Carey and of his associates, content to postpone the pleasure which awaits them on his arrival, while they behold the steady though gradual progress of light, and see, at no great distance, the idol temples fallen, the vedas and shasters consigned to oblivion, the cruel rites of a degrading superstition abhorred and abandoned, and *the kingdoms of*

this world become the kingdoms of God and of his Christ?

But by none will the removal of our excellent friend be more deeply felt than by our missionaries in India, and especially by the venerable Carey, whom he was the means of introducing into the ministry; a circumstance which he sometimes mentioned with honest triumph, after witnessing the career of that extraordinary man, who, from the lowest poverty and obscurity, without assistance, rose by dint of unrelenting industry to the highest honours of literature, became one of the first of orientalists, the first of missionaries, and the instrument of diffusing more religious knowledge among his contemporaries, than has fallen to the lot of any individual since the Reformation; a man who unites, with the most profound and varied attainments, the fervour of an evangelist, the piety of a saint, and the simplicity of a child. His chief consolation on receiving the melancholy tidings, will undoubtedly arise from the prospect of soon meeting in a better world, where those who have been fellow-pilgrims in this vale of tears will be associated in the presence of the Saviour, never more to part.

If the mere conception of the reunion of good men, in a future state, infused a momentary rapture into the mind of Tully; if an airy speculation, for there is reason to fear it had little hold on his convictions, could inspire him with such delight, what may we be expected to feel, who are assured of such an event by *the true sayings of God!* How should we rejoice in the prospect, the certainty rather, of spending a blissful eternity with those whom we loved on earth, of seeing them emerge from the ruins of the tomb, and the deeper ruins of the fall, not only uninjured, but refined and perfected, "with every tear wiped from their eyes," standing before the throne of God and the Lamb, *in white robes, and palms in their hands, crying with a loud voice, Salvation to God, that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever!* What delight will it afford to renew the sweet counsel we have taken together, to recount the toils of

combat, and the labour of the way, and to approach not the house, but the throne of God, in company, in order to join in the symphony of heavenly voices, and lose ourselves amidst the splendours and fruitions of the beatific vision!

To that state all the pious on earth are tending; and if there is a law from whose operation none are exempt, which irresistibly conveys their bodies to darkness and to dust, there is another, not less certain or less powerful, which conducts their spirits to the abodes of bliss, to the bosom of their Father and their God. The wheels of nature are not made to roll backward; every thing presses on towards eternity; from the birth of time an impetuous current has set in, which bears all the sons of men towards that interminable ocean. Meanwhile heaven is attracting to itself whatever is congenial to its nature, is enriching itself by the spoils of earth, and collecting within its capacious bosom whatever is pure, permanent, and divine, leaving nothing for the last fire to consume but the objects and the slaves of concupiscence; while every thing which grace has prepared and beautified shall be gathered and selected from the ruins of the world, to adorn that eternal city *which hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God doth enlighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.* Let us obey the voice that calls us thither; let us *seek the things that are above*, and no longer cleave to a world which must shortly perish, and which we must shortly quit, while we neglect to prepare for that in which we are invited to dwell for ever. Let us follow in the track of those holy men, who, together with your beloved and faithful pastor, have taught us by their voice, and encouraged us by their example, *that, laying aside every weight, and the sin that most easily besets us, we may run with patience the race that is set before us.* While every thing within us and around us reminds us of the approach of death, and concurs to teach us that this is not our rest, let us hasten our preparations for another world, and earnestly implore that grace, which alone can put an end to that fatal war which our desires

have too long waged with our destiny. When these move in the same direction, and that which the will of heaven renders unavoidable shall become our choice, all things will be ours; life will be divested of its vanity, and death disarmed of its terrors. *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness.*

ON THE SUBSTITUTION OF THE INNOCENT FOR THE GUILTY.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT

LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE,

April 3, 1822.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

About seven years ago I went down to Leicester, at Mr. Hall's especial request, for the purpose of advising with him as to the preparation of a volume of Sermons, an undertaking to which he had then made up his mind. After various conversations, we fixed upon twelve, the subjects of which, with their respective modes of discussion and application, he regarded himself as able to recall without much difficulty. Among the sermons then selected was the following, composed in confirmation of a momentous point of christian doctrine, and which he had preached at Luton, in the spring of 1822. He spoke of it as most readily occurring to his mind in its entire arrangement, and I therefore urged him to commit it to paper as soon as possible. This, there is reason to believe, he accomplished accordingly. But the continued indifferent state of his health, the numerous interruptions to which he was then exposed, and his total inability to satisfy himself in composing for the press, jointly concurred in detering him from advancing any farther towards the completion of his design, than to carry this sermon to its close, and to prepare the notes of *a few* others more fully than had been usual with him in his sketches for the pulpit.

The manuscript copy of this discourse, in Mr. Hall's own hand-writing, has been found since his death: not complete, it is true; but there are only two chasms of importance, and these I have been enabled to fill up by means of the reports of the same sermon which I have received from various friends. Although, therefore, I cannot but regret that the portions alluded to are not given precisely in Mr. Hall's language; yet, I trust, that nothing essential to the train of argument, or to its principal illustrations, is omitted.

June, 1831.

A SERMON.

Isaiah liii. 8.

For the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Isaiah has been usually styled the evangelical prophet; and, had no other part of his preaching descended to us except the portion before us, it would have sufficiently vindicated the propriety of that appellation. The sufferings of the Messiah are so affectingly portrayed, and their purpose and design so clearly and precisely stated, that we seem to be perusing the writings of an apostle rather than the predictions of a prophet: the obscurity of an ancient oracle brightens into the effulgence of gospel light. In no part of the New Testament is the doctrine of the atonement more unequivocally asserted, and the vicarious nature of our Lord's passion more forcibly inculcated, than in the context of the words selected as the basis of the present discourse.

It may not be improper to premise, that there is reason to believe that the original text has, in this instance, undergone some alteration, and that it anciently stood thus, *he was smitten unto death.* It was thus written by Origen, who assures us that a certain Jew, with whom he disputed, seemed to feel himself more pressed by this expression than by any other part of the chapter. It is thus rendered by the Septuagint in our present copies; and if, in this instance, it had not concurred with the original, neither could Origen* have

* See Orig. cont. Cels. lib. i. c.44, and Kennicott's Observations, quoted by Bishop Lowth, in his Notes on Isaiah liii.—Ed.

urged it with good faith, nor the Jew have felt himself embarrassed by the argument which it suggested.

The Jews pretend that no single person is designed in this portion of prophecy; but that the people of Israel collectively are denoted under the figure of one man, and that the purport of the chapter is a delineation of the calamities and sufferings which that nation should undergo, with a view to its correction and amendment. The absurdity of this evasion will be obvious to him who considers that the person who is represented as *stricken* is carefully distinguished by the prophet, from the people for whose benefit he suffered; *for the transgression of my people was he stricken:* in addition to which, he is affirmed to be stricken *even to death*, which, as Origen very properly urged, agrees well with the fate of an individual, but not with that of a people.

In spite of the vain tergiversation of the Jews, and the sophistry, equally impotent, of some who bear the christian name, this portion of ancient writ will remain an imperishable monument of *the faith once delivered to the saints*, of the harmony subsisting between the Old and the New Testament in relation to the scheme of mediation, and the basis of hope.

That the sufferings of the Redeemer were vicarious and piacular, that he appeared in the character of a substitute for sinners, in distinction from a mere example, teacher, or martyr, is so unquestionably the doctrine of the inspired writers, that to deny it, is not so properly to mistake, as to contradict, their testimony; it must be ascribed, not to any obscurity in revelation itself, but to a want of submission to its authority.

The doctrine in question is so often asserted in the clearest terms, and tacitly assumed as a fundamental principle in so many more; it is intermingled so closely with all the statements of truth, and inculcations of duty throughout the Holy Scriptures, that to endeavour to exclude it from revelation is as hopeless an attempt as to separate colour from the rainbow, or extension from matter.

It is no part of the purpose of this discourse to

enter into the proof of the substitution of Christ in the place of sinners, as the defence of that doctrine will frequently engage the attention of every christian minister.

In addressing those who are thoroughly confirmed in this belief, we may be allowed to proceed on the assumption of its truth, while we endeavour, in dependence on divine assistance, to illustrate the fitness of the scheme of *substitution*, and the indications which it affords of profound and unsearchable wisdom. Difficult as this subject must be allowed to be, I trust an attempt to discuss it, however feeble, is not exposed to the charge of presumption. It is one thing to presume to anticipate the counsels of Heaven, and another, after they are accomplished and exhibited as facts, humbly to explain the wisdom with which they are fraught. To have anticipated the scheme of redemption, by previously perceiving that it was, of all possible plans, the fittest to be adopted by a Being of infinite wisdom, was a task to which, it is probable, no finite intellect was adequate; but to perceive some of its congruities, when it is actually laid before us, may demand nothing . . . .

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[*Here there is a chasm in the manuscript: but from the notes of this sermon with which the Editor has been supplied, it may be filled, as to substance, thus:*—]

To perceive some of its congruities, may require but an ordinary degree of talent and discrimination, with an upright desire to learn what revelation teaches; and is altogether distinct from attempting to be *wise above what is written.*

In endeavouring to show the circumstances which render this extraordinary method of proceeding consistent with the character of God, we only pursue the guidance of the Sacred Writings, and find new motives for gratitude to our Heavenly Father for his unspeakable goodness.

Yet every reflecting person must perceive that there is in this doctrine something extremely remote from ordinary apprehension, apart from the instruction derived from Holy Writ. That one of the human race, by submitting to an ignominious and painful death, should be the moral source of the salvation of an innumerable multitude of mankind, and, if duly improved, a sufficient source for the salvation of all, is surely one of the most extraordinary of the divine proceedings with regard to man. Nothing like this has ever existed. It seems to stand by itself, an insulated department of Divine Providence, to contain within itself a method of acting which was never seen before, and will never be repeated.

Among men, the substitution of a righteous for a guilty person could rarely occur. There is seldom found sufficient heroism or virtue to induce an individual so to offer himself; such a combination of benevolence, and of generous oblivion of self-interest, as to induce such a sacrifice.

Nor would it be fit, in ordinary cases, that it should be admitted: it would be too great an expenditure of the most valuable and costly elements of society; besides that it would be contrary to all moral economy, to admit the violation of law to be pardoned at the expense of such as are its ornaments and blessings. No wise government would permit, to any considerable extent, a proceeding which would tend to continue in existence those who inflict misery on mankind, at the expense of those who are its blessings.

Besides, if this practice were common, even upon the supposition that no crime should pass without being followed by punishment as a necessary result, yet such would be the uncertainty, after crime had been committed, as to who should bear the punishment, as would tend to take away all fear of committing offences. The best provision of wise legislation, which is to prevent crime, not to punish, would thus be removed. It would become a kind of lottery who should suffer, and thus the dread of punishment would be greatly impaired, if not entirely destroyed.

It is evident, therefore, that, so far from this being a human device, it could never have been *thought of* as an ordinary mode of procedure. And though there are some traces in history of persons supposed to have presented themselves, as vicarious offerings for relatives or connexions, yet they are feebly attested: while, among the well attested records of judicial authority, we have *no* instance, probably, of any person who was himself innocent and upright being *admitted* as a substitute in behalf of the guilty. Yet that this is the way in which the Infinite Mind has proceeded in laying the foundation of human acceptance, none can doubt but those who are disposed to torture the plainest expressions.

Let us, therefore, consider, what circumstances met in this case, and must be supposed to concur on any occasion of this kind, to render fit and proper the substitution of an innocent person in the place of the guilty; and what is peculiar in the character of our Saviour, which renders it worthy of God to set him apart as *a propitiation for the sins of the world*, and annex the blessings of eternal life to such as believe in the doctrine of the cross, and repent, and turn to God.

[☞ *We now return to the original copy.*]

First. It is obvious that such a procedure as we are now contemplating, in order to give it validity and effect, must be sanctioned by the supreme authority. It is a high exertion of the dispensing power, which can issue from no inferior source to that from which the laws themselves emanate.

For a private person, whatever might be his station in society, to pretend to introduce such a commutation of punishment as is implied in such a transaction, would be a presumptuous invasion of legislative rights, which no well-regulated society would tolerate. To attach the penalty to the person of the offender is as much the provision of the law as to denounce it—they are equally component parts of one and the same regulation; and the power of dispensing with the laws is equivalent to

the power of legislation. Besides, so many circumstances, rarely, if ever combined, must concur to render such a procedure conducive to the ends of justice, that it would be the height of temerity to commit the determination of them to the exercise of private discretion instead of legislative wisdom.

This condition was most unequivocally satisfied in the mystery of Christ's substitution. When he undertook to *bear our sins in his own body on the tree*, he contracted no private engagement without the consent and approbation of his Heavenly Father. If he *gave himself for our sins, to redeem us from the present evil world*, it was *according to the will of God, even our Father.* On every occasion he reminds us, that he did nothing from himself, but that only which the Father had commissioned him to do. *I have power*, said he, *to lay down my life, and power to take it up again: this commandment received I of my Father. Hereafter I will not talk much with you, for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me; but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, so I do; Arise, let us go hence. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And we have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.** These inspired statements place it beyond all doubt, that christianity originated with the Supreme Governor of the universe, that its gracious provisions are the accomplishment of his counsel, and that its principles, however much they surpass the discoveries of reason, are in perfect harmony with the genuine dictates of natural religion. The substitution of the Redeemer in the room of sinners, was the contrivance of the same wisdom.

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* See John x. 18, to John xiv. 31. 1 John iv. 9, 10—14.

[*A second chasm in Mr. Hall's manuscript, supplied in substance from the notes of others.*]

Secondly. Another indispensable circumstance in such a proceeding, is, that it should be perfectly voluntary on the part of the sufferer. Otherwise, it would be an act of the highest injustice; it would be the addition of one offence to another, and give a greater shock to all rightly-disposed minds, than the acquittal of the guilty without any atonement. Whenever such an offering has been spoken of as taking place, it is represented as originating with the innocent person himself.

Here there appears, at first sight, an insuperable difficulty in the way of human salvation. How could that be rendered which was, at once, due to sin and mankind at large? Where could one be found that would endure the penalty freely, which was incurred by a sinful world? This our Saviour did. He not only came by authority, but such was his infinite love, that he came voluntarily. He expressed the deepest interest in his undertaking. He announced the particulars of his suffering, how he must be delivered, spit upon, and put to death; and in his hour of suffering, nothing is plainer than that he gave himself up to it voluntarily, according to the settled purpose of his own mind.

No sacrifice should go unwillingly to the altar. It was, indeed, reckoned a bad omen when any one did so. None ever went so willingly as *he*. *He was led as a lamb to the slaughter*, and evinced a readiness to be offered up. *He endured the cross*, *despising the shame*, all for *the joy that was set before him;* that glorious reward, the eternal happiness of an innumerable multitude of intelligent creatures, who must have perished if he had not been *stricken to death* for them.

Thirdly. It is farther necessary that the substitute not only undertake voluntarily, but that he be perfectly free from the offence which renders punishment necessary. If he were tainted with that for which the punishment was assigned; nay, if he were only in part implicated in any other crime, he had already incurred some

penalty, and there must be a proportionate deduction for what was due on his part.

Accordingly, in the case of man, divine justice cannot be willing to acquiesce in a substitute who is a sharer in guilt; for the law has a previous hold upon him; there is a debt due on his own account.

But Jesus Christ, though a man, was, by reason of his miraculous conception, free from the taint of original sin. *That holy thing* which was born of the virgin grew up in a course of perfect purity and rectitude. He could say to his enemies, *Which of you convinceth me of sin? He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.* He, and he alone, of all who are of our nature, appeared in this character. By this means he became an immaculate sacrifice. He was shadowed forth by a pure lamb. *He was as a lamb without spot.* It was not this that rendered the sacrifice sufficient, but in this respect it accomplished all that could be expected of a human sacrifice. His Father rested in him, not only because he was his beloved Son, a partaker of his divine nature, but because he was holy and *such an one as became us;* not that we had a claim to such a priest, but no other could answer for us. The Levitical high-priests could *never, with those sacrifices which they offered continually, year by year, make the comers thereunto perfect; for each ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins;* and therefore he could only be an imperfect figure of the true high-priest, who offered not for himself, but offered himself for us.

Fourthly. There would be a great propriety in this also, that the innocent person substituted for the guilty, should stand in some relation to him.

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ was related to mankind; one like them whom he came to redeem. It was indispensable that he should stand in close connexion with them to whom his righteousness was to be transferred. This was shadowed forth, in the law of a Redeemer of a lost estate. The person who was to redeem must be related: hence a redeemer and a relation were expressed by one term, and the nearest relation was to redeem

This was not merely a law suited to that state of society, but was intended to foreshow the congruity of the substitution of Christ. *Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same.* Thus he became *like unto his brethren. He took not on him the nature of angels, but took on him the seed of Abraham*, the seed he came to redeem. As he came to sinful men, he took on him the *likeness of sinful flesh. He was made like unto us in all points, yet without sin.* The brazen serpent lifted up for the cure of the Israelites, was of the same form as the serpents by which they were wounded. By one man came sin and death, by one man came redemption. *For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.* Much more is adduced to the same effect by St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, all tending to establish the truth, that as the first Adam was the cause of corruption, shame, and misery, so the second Adam is the source of holiness, life, and bliss.

Hence, then, the incarnation of our Lord was necessary. He was obliged to pass from one world to another, to take upon him a nature originally foreign from him. *I came forth from the Father*, saith he, *and am come into the world;* and justly will the love that prompted him to do so be the everlasting theme of all holy and happy beings. It is probable that if nothing else had rendered unsuitable the substitution of angels for men, this would have been sufficient, that on account of the essential difference between their nature and that of man, there would have been an incongruity in substituting their acts for ours. But Jesus Christ, by his incarnation, being of one flesh and of one spirit with us, was fitted to sustain the character of redeemer. He thus became indeed our kinsman, one in the same circumstances, under the same law, liable to the same temptations, subject to the same passions, encompassed about with our infirmities, but *sinless;* and thus suited every way to become a substitute for our guilty race.

[☞ *We again return to the original copy.*]

Thus much is certain, that as the wisdom of God saw it requisite that the redemption of guilty man should be effected by a sacrifice proportioned to the exigence of the case, the assumption of human nature followed as a natural consequence. The ancient sacrifices appointed by Moses, possessed not (it was impossible they should) any intrinsic validity; they exhibited not the expiation, but the remembrance of sin every year. This is the express declaration of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. *But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.* By his assumption of human nature he stood (notwithstanding that original superiority which removed him at an infinite distance) to the race of man in the relation of a brother; for the flesh which he condescended to take of the blessed virgin, of whom he was miraculously conceived, connected him with our common progenitor. *For both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one*, derived from one parent; *for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren; saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*

Fifthly. If the substitution of the innocent in the room of the guilty is at all permitted, it seems requisite that no advantage should be taken of a momentary enthusiasm, a sudden impulse of heroic feeling, which might prompt a generous mind to make a sacrifice, of which, on cool deliberation, he repented.

A proper space should be allowed for reviewing the resolution, for surveying it in all its consequences, and forming a settled and immoveable purpose. The self-devotion implied in such a transaction will acquire addi-

tional dignity in proportion as it appears the result, not of hurried and impetuous feeling, but of fixed determination and extended foresight; a resolution on which time has had no other effect than to fortify and confirm it.

How often is the pang of intense commiseration found to suggest the idea of sacrifices, which the calmer and more permanent dictates of self-interest consign to oblivion, and scatter to the wind! Perhaps there are few who have not been the subject of momentary feeling, the steady predominance of which would have made them heroes and martyrs, who yet shortly subside into their native selfishness, and before the season for action arrives, the genial current which warmed them for a moment is chilled and frozen.

In the case we are now contemplating, the admission of an innocent person to suffer instead of the guilty, nothing could reconcile the mind to such a procedure but such a settled purpose on the part of the substitute, as precludes the possibility of a vacillation or change. But this condition is found in the highest perfection on the part of the blessed Redeemer. His oblation of himself was not the execution of a sudden purpose, the fruit of a momentary movement of pity; it was the result of deliberate counsel, the accomplishment of an ancient purpose, formed in the remotest recesses of a past eternity. He was *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*. *Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, when he set a compass upon the face of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment; when he fixed the foundations of the earth: rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth; his delights were with the sons of men.*

It is appointed indeed *for all men once to die.* With us it is an event inseparably attached to an abode on earth. But with the Redeemer it was not so properly an incident of his earthly existence as its principal end and

design. He assumed life for the purpose of laying it down; and all the purposes, great as they were, which were accomplished by his life, were in entire subordination to those which he contemplated as the certain consequences of his death. In the course of his sojourn here, he never permitted himself to lose sight of it for a moment. The final scene, with all its terrors, was familiar to his imagination, and endeared to his heart; from no indifference to suffering, real or affected, but from the prospect of *the joy that was set before him. I have a baptism to be baptized with*, he exclaimed, *and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!* Instead of wishing to efface the remembrance of it by turning his attention to other objects, there was nothing which he appeared more solicitous to inculcate on the minds of his disciples than the certainty of his future sufferings. *Then took he unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. Then shall he be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be spitefully entreated and spit upon, and they shall scourge him and put him to death.* When Peter, shocked at these annunciations, presumed to expostulate with his divine Master, he met with the severest rebuke. *Get thee behind me, Satan*, said he, *for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* Until he had finished the work which was given him, he consulted his safety, often concealed himself, and avoided such an open display of his character and pretensions as might precipitate the designs of his enemies. But the moment the appointed time had arrived, we find him laying aside all reserve, courting the publicity which before he had shunned, and fearlessly, in the face of the sanhedrim, and even before the tribunal of Pilate, avowing himself *the Son of God*, though he well knew the effect would be to hasten his exit. While danger was at a distance, he was cautious and reserved; but the moment it arrived, he abandoned himself to it with a calm and fearless intrepidity.

Sixthly. In the case of the substitution of the inno-

cent for the guilty, it seems highly requisite that he who offers himself as the substitute, should justify the law by which he suffers. To say the least, the decorum of the transaction will be much heightened on the supposition, that he who sustains vicarious punishment, not only yields his entire consent, but proclaims, at the same time, his conviction of the equity and goodness of the legal enactment to which he falls a sacrifice. It were to be desired, though it can scarcely be hoped, that penal laws were so constructed as to impress a persuasion of their justice universally on those who have incurred their penalties. But in the case we are now considering, which is, that of an innocent person substituting himself in the place of the guilty, there is a peculiar reason for demanding his express approval of the equity of the original sentence. The enthusiastic admiration which such conduct would naturally excite, the reverence which such a display of unparalleled magnanimity would necessarily attach to its possessor, could not fail to add dignity to his character, and weight to his sentiments; and if, while he submitted to the penalty, he reprobated the severity of the law, the feelings of the spectators might be divided between esteem for the illustrious sufferer, and an aversion to the supposed rigour of the law. Thus the character of the sufferer would operate in a contrary direction to the punishment, and tend to defeat its salutary effects.

In the substitution of the Redeemer of mankind were conjoined the most prompt and voluntary endurance of the penalty, with the most avowed and cordial approbation of the justice of its sanctions. It was a great part of the business of his life, to assert and vindicate by his doctrine that law which he *magnified* and made illustrious by his passion.

Previous to his offering himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world, he was incessantly employed in rescuing the precepts of God from the false glosses by which they had been corrupted, in asserting their spirituality, exhibiting their extent, and sustaining their just authority, as the unalterable rule of action, and standard of duty.

Never had the law such an expounder as in the person of Him who came into the world to exhaust its penalties, and endure its curse. He condemned, with the greatest severity, every tenet or practice that went to weaken its obligations, or relax its strictness. To place it on the throne, to magnify and make it honourable, was not less the object of his ministry and of his life, than of his death. Thus, the sentiments of supreme devotion and attachment, to which he is entitled as the Saviour of the world, combine to strengthen our veneration for the law; nor can we pretend to any portion of the *mind of Christ*, but just in proportion to our practical regard to the law of God, as *holy*, *just*, *and good.* The more intimately our affections are united to Christ, the more, to speak in scripture language, *he dwells in our hearts by faith*, the more will the beauty of holiness attract the heart, and the deformity of sin be the object of our aversion. As the love of Christ is the master-principle in the christian system, so its operation must invariably coincide with the claims of divine authority; because it is the love of a personage who was distinguished from all others by a constant compliance with its dictates, and a most ardent devotion to its honour. *Think not that I am come to subvert the law or the prophets: I am come not to subvert, but to ratify. For, verily I say unto you, heaven and earth shall sooner perish than one iota or one tittle of the law shall perish without attaining its end.** In such terms as these did our Saviour assert the intrinsic excellence and unalterable perpetuity of the law of God; by which he has instructed us in the true nature of his sacrifice, which was designed not merely to appease wrath, but to satisfy justice; not merely to relieve misery, but to expiate guilt. It is of the utmost importance that it should be indelibly engraved on our minds, that Christ died not merely to rescue us from the ruin which we had incurred, but from the punishment which we had merited; since our gratitude for the provisions of mercy will be exactly

* Matt. v. 18. Dr. Campbell's version.

proportioned to the conviction we feel of the perfect equity of that sentence from which it exempts us. In this view we are unspeakably indebted to our great Deliverer for so zealously asserting the honours of that law which cost him so dear.

The penitent believer is now under no temptation to indulge depreciating thoughts of the immutable excellence and obligation of that rule of duty which he has so frequently and awfully violated.

Seventhly. That the voluntary substitution of an innocent person, in the stead of the guilty, may be capable of answering the ends of justice, nothing seems more necessary than that the substitute should be of equal consideration, at least, to the party in whose behalf he interposes. The interests sacrificed by the suffering party, should not be of less cost and value than those which are secured by such a procedure.

But the aggregate value of those interests must be supposed to be in some proportion to the rank and dignity of the party to which they belong. As a sacrifice to justice, the life of a peasant must, on this principle, be deemed a most inadequate substitute for that of a personage of the highest order. We should consider the requisitions of justice eluded, rather than satisfied, by such a commutation. It is on this ground that St. Paul declares it to be *impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins;* the intrinsic meanness of the brute creation being such, that a victim taken from thence could be of no consideration in the eyes of offended justice. They were qualified to exhibit, as he reminds us, *a remembrance of sin every year*, but are utterly unequal to the expiation of guilt.

In this view the redemption of the human race seemed to be hopeless; and their escape from merited destruction, on any principles connected with law and justice, absolutely impossible. For where could an adequate substitute be found? Where, among the descendants of Adam, partakers of flesh and blood, could *one* be selected of such preeminent dignity and worth, that *his* oblation of himself should be deemed a fit and proper

equivalent to the whole race of man? to say nothing of the impossibility of finding there a spotless victim (and no other could be accepted). Who is there that ever possessed that prodigious superiority in all the qualities which aggrandize their possessor to every other member of the human family, which shall entitle him to be the representative, either in action or in suffering, of the whole human race? In order to be capable of becoming a victim, he must be invested with a frail and mortal nature; but the possession of such a nature reduces him to that equality with his brethren, that joint participation of meanness and infirmity, which totally disqualifies him for becoming a substitute. Here a dilemma presents itself, from which there seems no possibility of escape. If man is left to encounter the judicial effects of his sentence, his ruin is sealed and certain. If he is to be redeemed by a substitute, that substitute must possess contradictory attributes, a combination of qualities not to be found within the compass of human nature. He must be frail and mortal, or he cannot die a sacrifice; he must possess ineffable dignity, or he cannot merit as a substitute.

Such were the apparently insurmountable difficulties which obstructed the salvation of man by any methods worthy of the divine character; such the darkness and perplexity which involved his prospects, that it is more than probable the highest created intelligence would not have been equal to the solution of the question, *How shall man be just with God?*

The *mystery hid from ages and generations*, the mystery of *Christ crucified*, dispels the obscurity, and presents, in the person of the Redeemer, all the qualifications which human conception can embody as contributing to the perfect character of a substitute. By his participation of flesh and blood, he becomes susceptible of suffering, and possesses within himself the materials of a sacrifice. By its personal union with the eternal Word, the sufferings sustained in a nature thus assumed, acquired an infinite value, so as to be justly deemed more than equivalent to the penalty originally denounced.

His assumption of the human nature made his oblation of himself *possible;* his possession of the divine rendered it efficient; and thus weakness and power, the imperfections incident to a frail and mortal creature, and the exemption from these, the attributes of time and those of eternity, the elements of being the most opposite, and deduced from opposite worlds, equally combined to give efficacy to his character as the Redeemer, and validity to his sacrifice. They constitute a person who has no counterpart in heaven or on earth, who may be most justly denominated "*Wonderful;*" composed of parts and features of which, (however they may subsist elsewhere in a state of separation,) the combination and union, nothing short of infinite wisdom could have conceived, or infinite power effected. The mysterious constitution of the *person* of Christ, the stupendous link which unites God and man, and heaven and earth; that mystic ladder, on which *the angels of God ascended and descended*, whose foot is on a level with the dust, and whose summit penetrates the inmost recesses of an unapproachable splendour, will be, we have reason to believe, through eternity, the object of profound contemplation and adoring wonder.

In ascribing the sufficiency and efficacy of the atonement made by our Saviour to the preeminent dignity of his person as the Son of God, we are justified by the direct testimony of scripture, which is wont to unite these together in such juxta-position, as plainly implies their intimate and inseparable relation to each other.

We have already seen that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews founds the insufficiency of the victims under the law to take away sin, on their inherent meanness, with which he contrasts the validity of the atonement made by Christ: a mode of reasoning, the force of which entirely depends on his superior dignity and worth. After asserting that the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin, he adds, *Then said I, Lo I come to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering, and burnt-offerings for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are*

offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. Adverting to the acknowledged fact that the blood of bulls and of goats availed to the purifying of the flesh, in other words, to the removal of ceremonial pollutions, he adds, *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living and true God?*

All must acknowledge that the purification of the conscience from dead works, that is, the pardon of sin and peace with God, is an infinitely greater benefit than the removal of legal disabilities under the ceremonial law; but the apostle teaches us to expect from the sacrifice of Christ this incomparably greater benefit, with a much firmer assurance than that with which the pious Jew anticipated the less. *The blood of Jesus Christ his Son*, St. John assures us, *cleanseth us from all sin.* If St. Peter has occasion to enforce the obligation of shunning the pollutions of the world, the argument he makes use of for that purpose is derived from the value of that blood which was shed for their redemption, in comparison to which all the treasures of the earth are consigned to contempt. *Forasmuch as ye know*, is his language, *ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

As the whole provision of a Saviour originated in the gracious purpose of God, it is with the utmost propriety that he is denominated his *gift;* the transcendent greatness of which is frequently brought forward as a demonstration of the ineffable extent of his love. *God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* But since he was

given to be a propitiatory sacrifice, the same intrinsic dignity and excellence which heightened the value of the gift, must have contributed in an equal degree to ensure the validity and sufficiency of the sacrifice.

Though many have presumed to call in question, and even to deny the divinity of our Saviour, I am not aware that there are any who embrace that fundamental doctrine, who hesitate for a moment respecting the intrinsic validity of his sacrifice, or who entertain a doubt of the sufficiency of such a provision to satisfy the claims of justice and vindicate the honours of a broken law. There is something so stupendous in the voluntary humiliation and death of him who claims to be *the only begotten of the Father*, *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*, that to convince us of the fact, the most powerful and unequivocal testimony is indispensably necessary; but to be convinced of the validity and sufficiency of such a sin-offering for all the purposes for which an offering can be made, to perceive it to be the most ample vindication of the moral attributes of God, in consistence with the pardon of sin and the salvation of sinners, no effort is necessary whatever: such a persuasion insinuates itself with the greatest ease, and takes the firmest possession of the mind. *He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

It is observable that the ineffable grace of God in the *communication* of spiritual blessings, is not more celebrated by the inspired penman than the stupendous method in which they are imparted. That eternal life should be bestowed on sinful men, is the subject of their devout admiration; but that it should be bestowed at such a cost, is still more so. They appear to conceive it impossible for such an apparatus to terminate in a less glorious result.

A cold and sceptical philosophy may, I am aware, suggest specious cavils against the doctrines of revelation on this subject; cavils which derive all their force, not from the superior wisdom of their authors, but solely from the inadequacy of human reason to the full compre-

hension of heavenly mysteries. But still there is a simple grandeur in the fact, that God has *set forth his Son to be a propitiation*, sufficient to silence the impotent clamours of sophistry, and to carry to all serious and humble men a firm conviction that the law is exalted, and the justice of God illustriously vindicated and asserted, by such an expedient. To minds of that description, the immaculate purity of the divine character, its abhorrence of sin, and its inflexible adherence to moral order, will present themselves in the cross in a more impressive light than in any other object.

Eighthly. However much we might be convinced of the competence of vicarious suffering to accomplish the ends of justice, and whatever the benefits we may derive from it, a benevolent mind could never be reconciled to the sight of virtue of the highest order finally oppressed and consumed by its own energies; and the more intense the admiration excited, the more eager would be the desire of some compensatory arrangement, some expedient by which an ample retribution might be assigned to such heroic sacrifices. If the suffering of the substitute involved his destruction, what satisfaction could a generous and feeling mind derive from impunity procured at such a cost? When David, in an agony of thirst, longed for the waters of Bethlehem, which some of his servants immediately procured for him with the extreme hazard of their lives, the monarch refused to taste it, exclaiming, *It is the price of blood!* but *poured it out before the Lord.* The felicity which flows from the irreparable misery of another, and more especially of one whose disinterested benevolence alone exposed him to it, will be faintly relished by him who is not immersed in selfishness. If there be any portions of history, whose perusal affords more pure and exquisite delight than others, they are those which present the spectacle of a conflicting and self-devoted virtue, after innumerable toils and dangers undergone in the cause, enjoying a dignified repose in the bosom of the country which its example has ennobled, and its valour saved. Such a spectacle gratifies the best propensities, satisfies the highest de-

mands of our moral and social nature. It affords a delightful glimpse of the future and perfect economy of retributive justice.

In the plan of human redemption, this requisition is fully satisfied. While we accompany the Saviour through the successive stages of his mortal sojourning, marked by a corresponding succession of trials, each of which was more severe than the former, till the scene darkened, and the clouds of wrath from heaven and from earth, pregnant with materials which nothing but a divine hand could have collected, discharged themselves on him in a deluge of agony and of blood, under which he expired,—we perceive at once the sufficiency, I had almost said, the redundancy of his atonement.

But surely deliverance even *from the wrath to come* would afford an imperfect enjoyment, if it were embittered with the recollection that we were indebted for it to the irreparable destruction of our compassionate Redeemer. The consolation arising from *reconciliation with God* is subject to no such deduction. While we rejoice in the cross of Christ as the source of pardon, our satisfaction is heightened by beholding it succeeded by the crown; by seeing him that was *for a little while made lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, seated at the right hand of God, thence expecting till his enemies are made his footstool.*

Thus, whether we contemplate the economy of redemption as a divine expedient for reconciling the moral attributes of Deity with man's salvation, or, in its final result, to the Saviour himself, it is replete with moral congruity, and satisfies every demand of the understanding and of the heart.

Ninthly. If the principle of substitution be at all admitted in the operations of criminal law, it is too obvious to require proof that it should be introduced very sparingly, only on very rare occasions, and never be allowed to subside into a settled course. So many circumstances, we have already seen, must concur to render it fit, that the attempt to make it a matter of

frequent and ordinary occurrence, would be preposterous to the utmost degree. It requires some great crisis to justify its introduction, some extraordinary combination of difficulties, obstructing the natural course of justice; it requires, that while the letter of the law is dispensed with, its spirit be fully adhered to; so that, instead of tending to weaken the motives to obedience, it shall present a salutary monition, a moral and edifying spectacle.

Considerations such as these are more than enough to show that such a method of procedure must be of rare occurrence; and that to this circumstance, whenever it does occur, its utility must in a great measure be ascribed

The substitution of Christ in the room of a guilty race receives all the advantage as an impressive spectacle, which it is possible to derive from this circumstance. *He once suffered from the beginning of the world;* nor have we the least reason to suppose any similar transaction has occured on the theatre of the universe, or will ever occur again in the annals of eternity. *It stands amidst the lapse of ages, and the waste of worlds, a single and solitary monument.*

From numerous intimations in Sacred Writ, we are compelled to believe that, in the comprehension of its design, and the extent of its consequences, affecting every order of being, it leaves no room for a counterpart or parallel; that it is, so to speak, the master-piece of infinite goodness and wisdom, intended to exhibit the riches of divine grace as an object for the eternal contemplation of the highest intelligences. *To the intent, that now unto principalities and powers, in heavenly places,* is the language of Paul, *might be made known, by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

Though the mystery of the cross may be considered as primarily terminating itself on the restoration of the human race to order and happiness, we cannot doubt for a moment of its extending its reflected lustre much farther, of its forming a new epoch in the moral ad-

ministration of the Deity, and giving birth to a new order of things in the heavenly world.

Nothing is more certain than that christianity is a system which is at present but partially developed, in condescension probably to our very limited faculties, which are incapable of comprehending it in its full extent.

Be this as it may, the dignity of our Lord's person, the design of his sacrifice, together with the avowed purpose of the Father to *gather together in him all things that are in heaven or in earth*, conspire to place it beyond all doubt, that the *substitution* of Christ is an *unique* event. With the praises due to *Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*, none will have merit to share; nor will the emotions of gratitude, which his matchless achievements inspire, ever be dissipated and impaired by being distributed among many objects. The name of Jesus will remain eternally distinguished from every other, as the name to which *every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, or things on earth.*

Tenthly. Once more, whenever the expedient of vicarious suffering is adopted, a publication of the design of that transaction becomes as indispensably necessary, as of the transaction itself; since none of the effects which it is intended to produce can be realised but in proportion as that is understood. Viewed in itself and considered apart from this, it would seem the height of injustice, and, in the room of improving, would give a violent shock to our moral sentiments. Punishment inflicted on the offending party speaks for itself, and when ordained by law, impresses the spectator with an instantaneous conviction of its justice and propriety.

With vicarious punishment it is just the reverse. It is a spectacle so far removed from the usual course of events, that nothing can reconcile the mind to it but a clear exposure of its origin and design, and the peculiar circumstances of the crisis which determined its adoption.

Hence we see the infinite importance, in the doctrine

of the cross, that not merely the fact of our Lord's death and sufferings should be announced, but that their object and purpose, as a great moral expedient, should be published to all nations. In vain would the apostles have proclaimed every where the fact, that Jesus of Nazareth, a person of spotless innocence, *was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and rose again the third day*, had they suppressed the mysterious design, the moral aspect of those stupendous transactions.

Apart from this, it would only have added one more to the humiliating examples of the purest virtue oppressed with calumny, and doomed to a violent, painful, and ignominious death. It might have called forth the tears of sensibility, and there it would have ended, without exerting the slightest influence on the prospects, or changing the destiny of men. But the cross of Christ was not exhibited as a tragic spectacle, adapted to move the commiseration of mankind, and excite their horror at the perfidy, cruelty, and ingratitude, which were the human precursors of, the means of producing, that catastrophe : such emotion it has already occasioned, and will to the end of time ; but all this in perfect subordination to a higher order of sentiments arising from the contemplation of his sufferings as the price of our redemption ; the matchless expedient which the wisdom of God, prompted by infinite compassion, devised for *reconciling the world unto himself.* The facts which compose the records of the New Testament, the miracles which illustrated the life of our Saviour, and the prodigies which attended his death, important as they are, viewed as the seals attesting his mission, are only subsidiary : the whole of these, together with the mission itself, owe their importance chiefly to his sacrifice.

In the preceding ages, many intimations were afforded of this mystery. Sin had scarcely made its entrance into the world, before the guilty pair were comforted by the promise of *a seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head.* The institution of vicarious sacrifices immediately succeeded, we have every reason to believe, by Divine appointment. The rejection of Cain's offering,

and the acceptance of Abel's, demonstrated the necessity of the shedding of blood. A system of figurative rites and ceremonies, intended as silent predictions of the future, in which bloody sacrifices occupied the chief place, were ordained by Moses as *shadows of good things to come.* The succeeding prophets, in long succession, proclaimed the advent, and depicted the character and sufferings of *him that was to come;* some with more particularity and perspicuity than others, but each with some trait or colour peculiar to himself; till at length, *in the fulness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons.*

The doctrine of remission of sins, through the blood of that victim which was once offered for the sins of the world, forms the grand peculiarity of the gospel, and was the principal theme of the apostolic ministry, and is still pre-eminently *the power of God to salvation.* It is inculcated throughout the New Testament in every possible form, it meets us at every turn, and is, in short, the sun and centre of the whole system.

Here, then, we are permitted to explore and contemplate that mysterious wisdom of God which was hidden in the secret of his counsels from preceding ages and generations, *but is now made manifest by the preaching of the holy prophets and apostles.* Here we behold the Deity, in Christ Jesus, *reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing to them their trespasses.* Here we discern the harmony of the divine attributes, as they are exerted and displayed in the astonishing work of man's salvation, the glory of God *shining in the face of Jesus Christ*, by which saints are changed into the *same image from glory to glory.* The cordial reception, the inwrought persuasion of this doctrine, cannot fail to purify the heart and renovate the character. The deepest conviction of the evil of sin, and the helplessness of the sinner, is necessarily involved in the belief of this all-comprehensive truth. For what estimate of the malignity and turpitude of sin must he have formed, who does nothing in vain, who saw that nothing would suffice for its expia-

tion, short of the precious blood of his only-begotten Son? And how fatal the impotence which required to be extricated from its miseries, to be relieved from its burden, at such a cost? To create man, nothing was required but a word, *He spake, and it was done.* But to recover him from the ruin in which sin had involved him, it was necessary for the Eternal Son to become incarnate, and *the Lord of life* to expire upon a cross. This is the mirror which reflects the true features and lineaments of moral evil, and displays more of its demerit than the most profound contemplation of the law, of the purity of its precepts, or the terror of its sanctions could have conveyed to any finite mind. In pouring its vials on the head of that innocent and adorable victim, it evinced its inflexible severity, its awful majesty, to an extent, and in a form never conceived before; and we may well suppose that superior intelligences turn from the contemplation of such a spectacle with a new impression of the Great Supreme, as *a just God, and yet a Saviour.*

He who derives from this doctrine the smallest encouragement to sin, has never either felt or understood it as he ought. He has never surveyed it in its most interesting aspect, in its relation to the character of God, the demands of his law, and the immutable rights of his moral administration. He has never, to speak in the language of scripture, *seen the Son* in such a manner as to *believe on him*; and, however he may be persuaded of the death of Christ as *a fact*, he is a total stranger to the doctrine of *Christ crucified.*

If the substitution of the Redeemer in the stead of a guilty race is admitted, it is easy to perceive that it is the only foundation of human hope; and that the attempt to combine it with any thing else as the material of justification, must necessarily be abortive. Nothing else can possibly stand in the same order. The merit of the Saviour, arising from his matchless condescension and love, in becoming *obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*, is of so elevated and transcendent a kind, as to disclaim all association with the imperfections of human virtue as the basis of justification. The price of redemp-

tion (to use a scriptural metaphor) has been paid; the justice of God is satisfied; a full and complete atonement has been made. Nothing remains on the part of the penitent sinner, but to receive the reconciliation, and, with the emotions of humble gratitude, to open his heart to that inspiration of love, which naturally results from the reception of so great a benefit.

The habitual contemplation of the cross of Christ, will be found the most effectual expedient for weakening the power of corruption, resisting the seductions of the world, and rising progressively into the image of God and the Redeemer.

It will, at the same time, lay the deepest foundation for humility. He who ascribes his salvation to this source, will be exempted from every temptation to exalt himself; and while he rejoices in the ample provision made for the pardon of his sins, and the relief of his miseries, he will join with the utmost ardour in the song of the redeemed: *To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.* Amen.

NOTES OF SERMONS.

ADVERTISEMENT.

Of the notes of sermons left by Mr. Hall, several were such mere skeletons that it did not seem expedient to publish them. Of those which have been selected for insertion, such as do not occupy more than eight or nine pages, seem simply to have been employed as pulpit notes, without any ulterior reference. Of the remainder some were undoubtedly and others probably, written more fully than his usual pulpit notes, that they might serve as the basis of a volume of sermons, which he intended to prepare for publication,* should the state of his health, and a moderate freedom from interruption, ever allow him to accomplish his wishes in that respect. As they now appear, however, they are all, in some measure, incomplete; not even the fullest of them are carried to half the extent of the preached sermons; and in but few is the *application* more than hinted.

It will not be expected, then, that these notes should evince the exquisite finish, in point of style, which they would have received from the author, had he prepared them at full length with a view to immediate publication; or that they should abound in those copious and accumulative amplifications of the subjects, or those touching and powerful appeals to the affections and conscience, by which his preaching was so eminently distinguished. Yet they will be found

* See Note of this Volume, p. 75.

to exhibit the same simple dignity and grace, often the same beauty and pathos, the same richness and variety of illustration, as his other works; while, if I mistake not, they manifest a more fixed and constant determination to elucidate and apply scriptural truth, a more vivid and awful conviction of the infinite importance of salvation to men who have lost the image and favour of God, and a more deep and pervading current of devotional feeling, than even the most admired of his former publications, eloquent, impressive, instructive, and often truly sublime, as they unquestionably are.

In preparing these notes for the press, no changes whatever have been made in the author's language.* In places where words are omitted, or the manuscript is illegible, the sense has been supplied by words introduced between the brackets. It was sometimes, however, exceedingly difficult to fill the chasms which thus occurred; and though I hope the correct sense has been generally caught and preserved, yet a few cases remain in which I am by no means confident that this desirable result has been obtained.

OLINTHUS GREGORY.

* To prevent misconception, it may be proper to state, that the references to texts at the feet of the pages are not in the original manuscripts, but have been annexed to save the reader the trouble of consulting a Concordance, in cases where it may seem desirable to examine passages in connexion with their context.

NOTES OF SERMONS.

I.

ON THE BEING AND NAME OF JEHOVAH.

Exod. iii. 14.—*And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shall ye say to the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.**

I. Let us consider the import of the name; the incommunicable name.
II. The proof of his [God's] possessing the attributes included in it.
III. The probable reasons of his choosing to represent himself under this character.

I. The import of the word Jehovah. It comes from a word which denotes to be, to exist; and the proper import of it appears to be permanent, unchanging existence. In the word Jehovah is included the affixes and terminations of the future and of the past; implying that he centres within himself all past, together with all future, existence.

The name I am in the LXX. is rendered ὁ ὢν.

In the first chapter of the Revelation of St. John, the Lord describes himself under the following character, "Who is, (ὁ ὢν,) and who was, and who is to come." It denotes eternal, original, unchanging Being.

Solve the difficulty respecting this name not being known to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob. He never

* Preached at Leicester, in October 1814.

used that name himself, though *Moses employs* it in reciting the communications he made to the nation.

II. We propose to demonstrate the existence of such a Being.

1. Something always must have existed, or nothing could have had an existence. To suppose the matter of this world, for example, to have arisen out of nothing, without any cause whatever, is, evidently, to suppose what is absurd and impossible.

2. Whatever exists of itself, and consequently from all eternity, can never cease to exist, and must be perfectly independent of every other being, with respect to existence, and the manner of its existence. Since it exists of itself, the cause and reason of its existence must, by the supposition, be in itself, not in another; it must have, so to speak, a perpetual spring of existence, independent of the operation or will of all other beings. It exists by absolute necessity. It exists because it cannot be otherwise than it is; for whatever can be so is contingent, not necessary. Hence it is absolutely unchangeable: which is sufficient to prove that matter is not that eternal, self-existent Being; because matter is undergoing continual changes; and, instead of being unalterable, is perfectly passive and indifferent to all changes whatever.

3. The Being who always existed, in and of himself, must be an intelligent Being, or a Being possessed of reason and understanding: for these exist; and since they could not arise out of nothing, they must have been produced by something or other. But they could not have been produced by what was unintelligent. Reason and understanding could no more have been caused by what had none, than matter could have arisen out of nothing. Take a lump of clay, or of any kind of inanimate matter, and ask yourselves whether it is not in the highest degree absurd to suppose that the power of remembering, of reasoning, of judging, should arise from that, as a cause. It is, plainly, just as possible that light should spring from darkness as a cause, as that which is incapable of thought should produce it. Whether the

power of thinking may possibly be superadded to matter, is not the question at present; admitting this were possible, it is plainly impossible that thought, or the power of thinking, should spring from inanimate matter as a cause. But as there are many beings possessed of reason and understanding, there must have been, at least, some one intelligent Being from eternity, or those thinking creatures could never have existed; since it is quite as impossible that thought and intelligence should arise out of unconscious matter, as that they should spring out of nothing.

As to the idea which some atheists have pleaded for, of an eternal succession of finite beings, such as we witness at present, without supposing any original, uncaused Being, it is evidently inconsistent with reason and with itself. For it affirms that to be true of the part, which it denies with respect to the whole: every particular being in the series, upon that supposition, depends upon a preceding one, yet the whole depends upon nothing; as if it were affirmed that there could be a chain infinitely long, each link of which was supported by the next, and so on, in each instance, and yet the whole absolutely depended upon nothing. The difficulty of supposing a being beginning to exist without a cause, is not at all lessened by supposing an eternal succession of such beings; for unless there be some first Being, on whom all the rest depend, it is evident the whole series hang upon nothing, which is altogether as impossible as that any one in particular should. Hence it is evident, there must have always been some one intelligent Being, whose existence is uncaused and absolutely eternal, unchangeable, and independent.

4. There is but one such Being. To affirm there is more than one, without reason, must, by the very terms, be unreasonable. But no shadow of reason can be assigned for believing in a plurality of such beings, because the supposition of one accounts for all that we see, as well, and even much better, than the supposition of more.

That there must be one underived, self-existent, eter-

nal, and intelligent Cause, must of necessity be allowed, in order to account for what we know to exist; but no reason can be assigned for supposing more. It is with the utmost propriety established as an axiom, that we ought in no case to assign more causes than will account for the effects. The harmony and order of the universe, and the sameness and universality of the laws which pervade every part of it, as far as our [knowledge]* extends, make it evident that it is the production of one eternal, intelligent Cause. Had it been the product of many, there would necessarily have been discrepancies, irregularities, and disorder in it, as the necessary effect of contrary plans and inclinations: at least it would have formed different systems, bearing the indication of their being the product of distinct authors; as we see no two individuals, left entirely to themselves, can be found, who would build a house exactly upon the same plan, of the same size, and with the same ornaments. The most fundamental laws of the material world [not only] pervade this globe which we inhabit, but are found to extend to the remotest bounds of the universe, as far as they have fallen under our observation, either by the naked eye or by telescopes. The compound [substance] of light which illuminates our system, is found to extend to the region of the fixed stars, immeasurably more distant from us than the sun. The law of gravitation pervades every particle of matter, at least within the solar system; and, there is every reason to believe, throughout the whole universe. Such simplicity and uniformity in the laws of nature, evince that they are the product of one and the same Intelligence.

III. We propose to consider why he chose to reveal himself, especially under this character, rather than under some one expression of his moral perfections.

* Mr. Hall's hand-writing is frequently so chaotic as to defy all interpretation; and words, and short portions of sentences, are sometimes omitted. In such cases, the sense is supplied conjecturally; and that the author may not be blamed for any imperfections in style or phraseology, which may thus be occasioned, the words introduced by the editor are uniformly placed between brackets, as above.—Ed.

1. This is an attribute of God, to which the heathen deities did not aspire. It was fit to be the name of that Being who was, when worshipped, to be maintained in the midst of surrounding idols, of a character totally distinct.

None of them pretended to be the supreme God, the Origin and Father of existence.

2. So abstract and elevated a conception of the Great Supreme, was less likely than [any] other to be perverted into image-worship.

No ideas are so impossible to paint, or represent under sensible forms, as self-origination, immutability, eternal existence, &c.

The import of Jehovah—not positive—but negative.

3. It exhibits that view of the divine character, which is *most peculiar* and appropriate to the Supreme Being, and from which his other perfections may most satisfactorily be inferred and deduced.

No other being possesses any degree of them. And from these may be inferred, his absolute, infinite perfection, rectitude, &c. &c.

This is the great, glorious, and fearful name, "THE LORD OUR GOD."*

* * * * * *

II.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

Isaiah xxxi. 3.—*The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit.*†

I. THE spirituality of the Divine Nature is intimately connected with the possession of almighty power. The vulgar notion, which would restrict the exercise of power to what is corporeal, and deny it to that which is spiritual

* Deut. xxviii. 58.

† See vol. vi. pp. 1—23, for Mr. Joshua Wilson's notes of this sermon, as preached in 1822 and 1824.

and immaterial, is a mere prejudice, founded on gross inattention or ignorance. It probably arises chiefly from the resistance which bodies are found to oppose to the efforts to remove or displace them. But so remote is this from active power, that it is entirely the effect of the *vis inertiæ*, or the tendency of matter to continue in the [same] state, whether it be of rest or of motion. If we inquire after the original seat of power, we shall invariably find it in mind, not in body; in spirit, not in flesh.

The changes we are able to effect in the state of the objects around us, are produced through the instrumentality of the body, which is always previously put in motion by the mind. Volition, which is a faculty, if you please, or state, of the mind, moves the muscles and the limbs, and those the various portions of matter by which we are surrounded; so that in every instance, it is the spirit or immaterial principle which originally acts, and produces all the subsequent changes. Take away the power of volition, which is a mental faculty, and our dominion over nature is at an end. Within a certain sphere, and to a certain extent, the will is absolute; and the moment we will a certain motion of the body, that motion takes place. Though we are far from supposing that the Deity is the soul of the world, as some have vainly asserted, the power which the mind exerts over certain motions of the body, may furnish an apt illustration of the control which the Supreme Spirit possesses over the universe.

As we can move certain parts of our bodies at pleasure, and nothing intervenes betwixt the volition and the corresponding movements, so the great original Spirit impresses on the machine of the universe what movements he pleases, and without the intervention of any other cause. "He speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast."*

It is impossible to conceive of motion arising of its own accord among bodies previously at rest, and motion

* Ps. xxxiii. 9.

is not essential to matter, but merely an incidental state; no account can be given of the beginning of motion but from the previous existence of mind; and, however numerous and complicated the links through which it is propagated, however numerous the bodies which are successively moved or impelled by each other, it must necessarily have originated in something immaterial, that is, in mind or spirit. It is as a Spirit that the Deity is the original author of all those successive changes and revolutions which take place in the visible universe, arranged by UNSEARCHABLE wisdom, to which it owes all its harmony, utility, and beauty. It is as a Spirit that he exists distinct from it, and superior to it, presiding over it with the absolute dominion of Proprietor and Lord, employing every part of it as an instrument passive in his hand, and perfectly subservient to the accomplishment of his wise and benevolent designs. To this great Father of Spirits, the very minds which he has formed are in a state of mysterious subordination and subjection, so as to be for ever incapable of transgressing the secret bounds he has allotted them, or doing any thing more, whatever they may propose or intend, than concur in executing his plan, or fulfilling his counsel.

II. His spirituality is closely connected with his invisibility: "The King eternal, immortal, invisible,"* "whom no man hath seen, or can see."†

Whatever is the object of sight must be perceived under some determinate shape or figure; it must be, consequently, bounded by an outline, and occupy a determinate portion of space, and no more; attributes utterly incompatible with the conceptions of an infinite being. He was pleased formerly, indeed, to signalize his presence with his worshippers by visible symbols, by an admixture of clouds and fire, of darkness and splendour; but that these were never intended to exhibit his power, but merely to afford a sensible attestation of his special presence, is evident, from the care he took to prevent his worshippers from entertaining degrading

* 1 Tim. i. 17. † 1 Tim. vi. 16.

conceptions of his character, by the solemn prohibition of attempting to represent him by an image or picture. And after he had appeared to the congregation of Israel on the mount, Moses is commanded to remind them that they saw no similitude.

(Here speak of the impiety of the church of Rome, as to these points.)

The only visible representation of the Deity, which revelation sanctions, is found in his Son incarnate, in "Emmanuel, God with us;"* "who is the image of the invisible God."† The picturing of the Deity tends to produce degrading conceptions of the divine nature, partly as it circumscribes what is unlimited, and partly since the human form will generally be selected, by leading men to mingle, with the idea of God, the imperfections and passions of human nature.

III. That God is *spirit*, and not flesh, is a view of his character closely connected with his omnipresence. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit, and whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."‡

Matter is subjected to a local circumscription; God, as a spirit, is capable of *co-existing* with every other order of being.

IV. Because God is a *spirit*, and not flesh, he is possessed of infinite wisdom and intelligence. Thought and perception are the attributes of mind, not of matter; of spirit, and not of flesh; and for this reason, the original and great Spirit possesses them in an infinite degree. They cannot belong to matter, because matter is divisible into an infinite number of parts; so that, if

* Matt. i. 23. † Col. i. 15, ‡ Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.

the power of thinking subsists in these, there are, in reality, as many distinct thinking principles as there are parts, and the mind of every individual must be a congeries, or assemblage of an infinite number of minds. But if thought subsists in none of the parts separately taken, it cannot subsist in the whole; because a whole is nothing more or less than all the parts considered together, and nothing can be found in the whole, but what previously exists in the several parts.

During the union between the soul and the body, the organs of the latter become the instruments of perception; but it is the mind alone which thinks, which alone is conscious, which sees in the eye, hears in the ear, feels in the touch. The Infinite Spirit is, consequently, all eye, all ear, all intelligence, perception, and .....

V. The spirituality of the Divine Nature lays a foundation for the most intimate relation between the intelligent part of the creation and himself. He is emphatically "the Father of Spirits." The relation of the parent to the child is very intimate and close, because the parent is the *instrument* of his being: but God is the AUTHOR. The earthly parent is our father after the flesh, the heavenly is our father after the *spirit:* and in proportion as the mind constitutes the most important portion of our nature, the relation subsisting between us and God is the most interesting and the most essential. "He is not far from any of us, seeing we are his offspring; in him we live, and move, and have our being."* The body connects us with the external universe; the soul connects us with God. The flesh is his production; the *spirit* is his image: and, as the former separates us from him by a dissimilarity of nature, so the latter assimilates us to him by the possession of principles and laws congenial with his own.

VI. The spirituality of the Divine Nature fits him for becoming our eternal portion and supreme good. That which constitutes and secures our felicity, must be

* Acts xvii. 27, 28

something out of ourselves; since we find ourselves utterly inadequate to be the source of our own enjoyment, we find that, without allying ourselves to an object distinct from our own nature, we are desolate and miserable. To retire within our own nature in quest of happiness, is an idle and fruitless attempt. The mind feels itself fettered and imprisoned until it is allowed to go forth, and unite itself to some foreign object.

Again, to form the happiness of a mind must be the prerogative of something superior to itself; nor is there any greater superiority conceivable than that of being the source of enjoyment, the bestower of happiness on another. But while it is superior, it must be congenial in its nature. A spiritual being must possess spiritual happiness; the proper enjoyment of the mind must consist in something mental.

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III.

OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT OF TWELVE LECTURES ON THE SOCINIAN CONTROVERSY.*

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

Jude 3.—*It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.*

LECTURE II.

ON THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST.

Matt. xxii. 41, 42.—*While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?*

Four classes of passages adduced in proof of this.

I. Those passages which speak of the origin of Jesus

* Delivered at Leicester in 1823.

Christ, and which accompany this by a specification of "the flesh" in such a formula that the flesh is never employed in a similar manner in the history of men.

II. Those passages in which it is affirmed by Jesus Christ and by his disciples, that he did come down from heaven to the earth, and that by virtue of his name.

III. Those passages which, though they do not exactly assert that Jesus Christ existed before he came into our world, yet this is the necessary conclusion from them.

IV. One passage in which our Lord directly affirms this proposition in so many words, and no other proposition (John viii. 58.)

LECTURE III.

ON THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

Matt. xxii. 41, 42.

This attempted to be proved from those passages in which the titles of God are ascribed to Jesus Christ, of which there are *three* kinds:

I. Those in which he is styled the Son of God.

II. Those in which he is styled not the Son of God, but God himself.

III. Those which are quoted by the apostles from the Old Testament, in which the word Jehovah is ascribed to Jesus Christ.

LECTURE IV.

The Divinity of Christ proved from those passages in which the creation of the visible universe is ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. This fact is established by scripture testimony, and,

II. The attention directed to the necessary conclusion which is to be derived from it, That if Jesus Christ appear by scripture testimony to be the Creator of all

things, he is necessarily God; since the primary idea which man entertains of God identifies those perfections which created the world with the existence of Deity.

LECTURE V.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST PROVED FROM HIS BEING THE OBJECT OF DIVINE WORSHIP.

Worship may be considered as *mental* or *local*. It is to *mental* worship, as consisting of those sentiments of adoration of the Deity for his great mercies, a dependence upon the Author of them, a desire of his favour, and submission to his will, which mark every devout christian, and expressed in the language of prayer or praise, to which this part of the discussion is chiefly confined.

LECTURE VI.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST PROVED FROM CERTAIN MISCELLANEOUS CONSIDERATIONS, WHICH COULD NOT WITH CONVENIENCE BE REDUCED TO ANY ONE HEAD, SIMILAR TO THOSE ALREADY BROUGHT FORWARD.

I. If Jesus Christ be not a divine person, let me say, it is utterly inconceivable how he can discharge the office and assumption of Head of the Church, and Lord of the christian dispensation.

II. The simple humanity of Christ is utterly inconsistent with those perfections which are ascribed to the Saviour; since there is not a single attribute of the divine nature which is not found ascribed in different forms to our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. The idea of the simple humanity of Christ is utterly incompatible with that ardour of sentiment, of which he is represented in every part of scripture as the object.

IV. The Divinity of Christ is plain, from the fact of his being created and appointed the Judge of the Universe.

LECTURE VII.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST PROVED TO BE NOT A NEW DOCTRINE, BUT THAT IT WAS KNOWN BEFORE THE NICENE COUNCIL HELD IN THE BEGINNING OF THE FOURTH CENTURY, BY REFERENCES TO THE FATHERS:—BARNABAS, HERMAS, IGNATIUS, CLEMENS ROMANUS, POLYCARP, JUSTIN MARTYR, THEOPHILUS BISHOP OF ANTIOCH, IRENÆUS, TERTULLIAN, CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, ORIGEN, AND CYPRIAN.

[The above five Lectures upon the Divinity of Christ were preached from the same text; Matt. xxii. 41, 42.]

LECTURE VIII.

ON THE PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Matt. xxviii. 19.—*Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

The first proof of the personality of the Holy Spirit appears to result from the manner in which the Spirit, whatever is intended by that word, is mentioned in the Scriptures.

In order to understand this it is necessary to reflect upon the meaning of the word "Spirit."

The first meaning of the term Spirit, is wind, or breath. (John iii. 8.)

The next use of the term Spirit, in the Scriptures, and other writers, in analogy to this, is to denote the invisible and immaterial part of man, in distinction from that which is corporeal, fleshly, and tangible. (Matt. xxvi. 41.)

Again, It is applied to those supernatural agents who are supposed not to be clothed with gross flesh and blood, and not to be possessed of bodies, or any fleshly vehicle whatever. (Luke xxiv. 39; x. 17, 20.)

The fourth meaning of this term is very agreeable to the former. By way of distinction, the word Spirit is applied to the third person in the blessed Trinity; that is, THE SPIRIT, by way of eminence; and it appears to be so employed when it is preceded by the definite article: τὸ πνεῦμα, THE SPIRIT.

The second argument on this subject is derived from

the obvious consideration, that the particular acts which are ascribed to the Holy Spirit, and its inspirations, are such as are totally inconsistent with any idea but that of his being a proper person.

Speaking is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. (2 Sam. xxiii. 2; 1 Tim. iv. 1; Acts xiii. 2.) Approbation is ascribed to the Spirit. (Acts xv. 28.)

The passion of grief is often applied to the Spirit of God. (Eph. iv. 30; Isaiah lxiii. 10.)

Suffering or permitting is predicated of the Holy Spirit. (Acts xvi. 7.)

Sin can be committed against nothing but a person; but Peter addresses Ananias in these words, "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? &c. (Acts v. 3, 4; Matt. xii. 32.)

The third argument for the personality of the Holy Spirit, is derived from the personal pronouns applied to the Spirit of God, in such a manner as cannot be accounted for, except upon the obvious supposition of the intention of our Saviour to represent the Spirit of God under the character of a person. (John xiv. 16—26; xv. 26; xvi. 13.)

In the fourth place, the passage which has been taken as the foundation of this discourse, appears to afford an irrefutable proof of the truth for which we are contending; because the Holy Spirit is here associated in such a manner with two real and divine persons, as would render the connexion unaccountable, if a real person was not understood in the third as well as in the two former instances.

LECTURE IX.

ON THE ATONEMENT.

1 Cor. xv. 3.—*For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.*

I. The first argument in proof of the atonement of Christ, is, that the death of the Saviour is repeatedly stated to be a proper sacrifice.

LECTURE X.

ON THE ATONEMENT.

1 Cor. xv. 3.

II. The second argument for this doctrine is this; That the importance which the inspired writers attach to the blood of Christ is utterly inconsistent with the socinian hypothesis, of his death being merely an example, and as that of a martyr sealing his testimony with his blood.

III. The inspired writers mention the subject of the death of Christ in such a manner as implies its being a real and proper substitution.

IV. The Scriptures in numerous passages declare, that Jesus Christ is the proper cause and author of our salvation, and all the spiritual benefits which the gospel announces.

V. The exaltation of Jesus Christ at the head of the universe, which is expressly declared to be the reward of his sufferings and death, is utterly inconsistent with any supposition short of their being expiatory.

LECTURE XI.

ON THE PERSONALITY AND REAL EXISTENCE OF SATAN.

Matt. iv. 1.—*Then was Jesus led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.*

The evidence for this proposition must be a matter of pure revelation; for, when we consider the innumerable multitude of beings inferior to us, a chain that descends from ourselves to the very verge of non-entity by such mutations of littleness, that they are for ever eluding our senses; they leave it uncertain, that there are not as many besides in the middle stages as in open vision. The inference, rather than the contrary, is, that they exist in an equal scale—that there are as many gradations of beings raised above us, as there are beneath us. An ascending series is as probable as the descending, though we may not be as familiar with one as with the other.

Nor is it improbable that there are invisible or spiritual agents in an inferior order to man. When we consider the infinite variety of forms of which nature is susceptible, it is not improbable that there are in existence, beings, either purely spiritual, or possessed of a vehicle so refined as to elude our senses, and, therefore, justly styled spirits.

But here let us consider the tenour of scripture on this subject:—

I. The sacred record gives us an idea of a spiritual order of beings styled angels.

II. Let us examine the solutions, given by the socinians, of the language of scripture on the subject, and see whether these solutions will answer the various occasions on which it occurs, and whether the difficulty of the passages can be considered as removed by the interpretation which these solutions suggest.

Those who oppose the doctrine of the real existence of Satan, suppose in general that the words Satan, and Devil, are used as a prosopopeia, or personification, though what they are intended to personify they cannot agree [about]. Sometimes they are supposed to personify evil in the abstract; at other times, the Jewish magistrates and priests; at other times, the Roman magistrates and rulers; and at other times, a personal enemy to the apostle Paul in the church.

LECTURE XII.

ON THE SPIRIT OF SOCINIANISM.

Psalm xix. 7.—*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.*

I. It is a peculiar characteristic of this system, that, as far as it is distinguished from the orthodox, it consists entirely of negations, and is marked by its possessing nothing of all, or nearly all, of those doctrines which the other parts of the professed disciples of Jesus Christ consider most precious and most saving.

II. Unitarianism has a close affinity to deism.

III. Another feature in this system is its anti-devotional character.

IV. A remarkable feature in the system of the socinians, is their mixture along with their doctrine of metaphysical speculation, which is more replete with danger than any of the errors before-mentioned.

V. Another feature in this system, is the tame submission to human authority, which seems to distinguish, above all other persons, those who compose the class styled Modern Unitarians.

VI. The last feature which I shall mention, in the system of the socianians, is their zeal for proselytism.

IV.

ON CHRIST'S DIVINITY AND CONDESCENSION.

Phil. ii. 5. 9.—*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation.**

That species of excellence to which such language can be applied with sobriety, must be carried to a height and perfection which requires no ingenuity to discover it; it must strike all eyes, and ravish all hearts.

But since it is benevolence, not in the general idea of it, but under the specific form of condescension, that we are seeking after, we are under the necessity of looking, in the passage before us, for some obvious and striking contrast or opposition between the dignity of the Saviour, and those instances in which he appeared to depart from that dignity. A visible disparity must subsist betwixt what he did, and what he might, from his pre-eminent elevation, have been expected to do.

A part of the Saviour's character, to which the in-

* Mr. Hall's notes, here given, do not present an outline of the whole sermon, but merely a statement of the principal part of the argument. A tolerably full account of the entire sermon, as it was preached in London, in June 1813, is inserted in the sixth volume, pp. 69—89. Ed.

spired writers are continually adverting, and on which they dwell with impassioned energy, must unquestionably present itself in a very conspicuous light, so that no interpretation can for a moment be admitted, which requires much ingenuity to discover the very existence of that virtue it is adduced to illustrate.

There are two opposite opinions entertained respecting the person of Christ, to which, without adverting to the intermediate ones, we shall at present confine our attention, with a view to determine which of these accords best with the professed design of the apostle in introducing it, which is, to illustrate the wonderful condescension of the Son.

The first of these opinions involves the divinity of Christ, supposing him to be the proper Son of God, who assumed our nature into a personal union with himself; and, having in that nature lived a life of poverty and humiliation, expired on the cross for human redemption. The second considers him as a mere man, who had no existence whatever till he came into our world.

Now, let us consider which of these two opposite views best accords with the passage under consideration, contemplated as a professed illustration of his marvellous condescension, "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." We are willing to admit the correction of the common version, suggested by our opponents, and consider the meaning of the latter clause, that he "did not eagerly retain the likeness of God." The force of the adverb which introduces the subsequent clause, and the general structure of the passage, appear to me to justify such an alteration; nor are we aware of any advantage occurring to the system we oppose by such a rendering. The socinians suppose that the purport of this member of the sentence is to assert, that though our Lord was possessed of miraculous power, by which he might have drawn to himself that homage which is only due to the Supreme Being, yet he declined making such a use of these powers. The first instance of his matchless humility and condescension, on

their hypothesis, is in his not impiously turning the weapons with which he was armed, against their Author thus employing himself to establish, in his own person, that which it was one great end of his mission to subvert. That humility with which the apostle was so much enraptured [consisted, then,] in [our Lord's] not being guilty of the grossest ingratitude and impiety; in not betraying his trust by advancing his own honour and interest on the ruins of his from whom he derived his commission. That our Saviour could not have acted the part which he is supposed to have declined in this instance will surely be admitted; but what a preposterous illustration is that of matchless condescension, which is placed in a mere abstinence from impiety and rebellion!

From the preliminary remarks we have made, I trust it must be sufficiently evident that this cannot be the illustration which St. Paul designed to furnish of unparalleled lowness and condescension. It deserves to be remarked too, that in this sense, "the form of God" belongs equally to every person who has possessed miraculous powers to an extent not inferior to those exerted by our Saviour, which, as we learn both from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the express language of the Saviour himself, was the case with his apostles. In consequence of those powers, St. Paul was, on one occasion, made an object of idolatry, which he disclaimed with the utmost vehemence and abhorrence; so far was he from assuming any extraordinary merit on account of declining so impious a distinction. Besides, let me ask, would such a use of the supernatural succours afforded our Saviour, as to suffer them to be the occasion of his being worshipped, have produced their withdrawment? If they would not, there must be some legitimate ground for his being worshipped, inapplicable to every other case. If they would, what is there admirable in his declining to convert them to a purpose which he knew would issue in their extinction? Can the inspired writer be supposed for a moment to introduce, with so

much pomp and solemnity, a branch of our Lord's conduct which the smallest portion of prudence sufficiently accounts for?

"He made himself of no reputation," or, more literally, "he emptied himself," "he divested himself;" the writer most unquestionably means, of somewhat which he heretofore possessed. But of what, on the hypothesis of the simple humanity of Christ, did he divest himself? As this clause commences the positive statement of the instances of his humility, preceded by, and contrasted with the dignity involved in the attribute of "being in the form of God," it seems necessary to understand it in relation to that prior dignity. But this on the socinian hypothesis, is impossible, since they place the form of God in his possession of miraculous energy, of those supernatural powers, of which from the time of his entering on his ministry, he neither divested himself at any time, nor suspended the exercise. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" nor is there the slightest intimation throughout the whole evangelical history, that his humility was rendered conspicuous by his declining the exercise of miraculous powers. Here, then, the illustration, upon the supposition we are combating, completely fails at the very outset, from the total absence of that bold and striking contrast which the first member of the sentence leads us to expect. The form of God is attributed to him as the basis of a certain elevation, let its precise import be what it may. And, when the antithetic form of expression prepares us to expect something opposed to it, our expectation is frustrated, and the form of God is still retained. Did this divesture consist of his descending from a superior station in society? But this he never possessed. His worldly rank and estimation, humble as it was, was as great in the last, as in the first period of his ministry. To decline a possible distinction, and to lay aside a distinction already possessed, are certainly things very distinct; nor is it easy to conjecture why, if the former was intended, the latter was expressed; besides that, admitting such a confusion of language

to be possible, the conception conveyed bears no relation to the form of God.

The words of the apostle evidently suppose that our Saviour possessed, in the first instance, some great and extraordinary distinction; that in the execution of his commission, from motives of pure benevolence, he submitted to a state of great comparative meanness and humiliation. The order of the words, as well as the very species of excellence they are designed to illustrate and enforce, necessitate the placing of the dignified attribute first. But on the hypothesis of the simple humanity of Christ, the real order of things, the actual course of events, is just the reverse. Our Saviour, on that hypothesis was elevated immensely above his native condition by his delegation as the Messiah, and from a state of extreme obscurity and poverty he became, in consequence of it, possessed of the form of God. His poverty and meanness compose the first stage of his history; and whatever elevation above his equals he afterwards possessed, was purely the effect of his appointment to the office of the Messiah. So that, in the office he sustains, he exhibits a marvellous instance of incredible elevation from meanness, instead of affording a striking example of voluntary humiliation. On the socinian hypothesis the whole of what is truly admirable is, that a mean and obscure individual should have been raised from so much meanness, not that he voluntarily submitted to it. It must be obvious to the thoughtful and intelligent, that this hypothesis completely frustrates the design of the passage, and presents the whole matter in an inverted position.

His public undertaking, in the room of affording an unparalleled instance of condescending benevolence, is the greatest example of eminent virtue conducting to illustrious honour, the world ever witnessed.

In a complex train of action, involving considerable space of time, and a great variety of events, if there be any conspicuous feature insisted on in the character of the agent, it ought to be of such a nature as to pervade the whole mass. The benevolence and condescension of

our Lord are uniformly represented by the inspired writer as actuating him in the whole course of his proceedings, as the chief spring of his conduct, so as to characterize his whole undertaking. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," saith St. Paul, "how that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich." His giving himself for the church is celebrated as a most interesting instance of condescension and love. But if, apart from his public engagements, as the great Teacher sent from God, he possessed no separate nor original dignity; if to these engagements he is indebted for all that distinguished him above the meanest peasant in Galilee, what candour or sobriety appear in such representations? If we listen to the writers of the New Testament, his undertaking the office he sustained, was a proof of matchless humility; if we look to the facts, we find all the honour he ever possessed was the pure result of these offices. That it is possible to combine with such views of his character the admission of an eminent portion of virtue, we are far from denying; but it is not that sort of virtue, nor includes any of that sacrifice of personal honour and interest, which such representation supposes.

V.

ON THE SPIRIT AND TENDENCY OF SOCINIANISM.

Psalm xix. 7.—*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.*

The minute examination of the minor parts of a great and complex object, will not suffice to give us a just conception of it, unless it is joined with an attentive survey of it as a whole. We have hitherto been occupied with the consideration of the errors of the socinian or unitarian system in detail. We have endeavoured to evince the opposition of several of its fundamental tenets to the clear, unequivocal testimony of scripture;

and, in the course of the inquiry, have felt the necessity of descending to minute distinctions and tedious discussions. Could we even suppose the reasoning employed in the several branches of this extensive argument, to have wrought all the conviction we could wish, the conclusion might still continue destitute of an adequate impression of the general character and tendency of the system, against which these discourses have been directed. Instead of attempting a recapitulation of the topics discussed, and the arguments adduced, useless as it would possibly be if slight and general, and insufferably tedious if accurate and extensive; allow me to close these lectures by directing your attention to some of the distinguishing characteristics of the system, designated by the appellation of Modern Unitarianism.

I. It will occur to the most superficial observer to remark, that, as far as it differs from the orthodox, it is almost entirely a negative system, consisting in the bold denial of nearly all the doctrines which other denominations are wont to regard as the most vital and the most precious. It snatches from us almost every thing to which our affections have been habituated to cling without presenting them with a single new object.

It is a cold negation, a system of renunciation and dissent, imparting that feeling of desolation to the heart, which is inseparable from the extinction of ancient attachments; teaching us no longer to admire, to adore, to trust, or to love—but with a most impaired and attenuated affection—objects, in the contemplation of which, we before deemed it safe, and even obligatory, to lose ourselves in the indulgence of these delightful emotions.

Under the pretence of simplifying christianity, it obliterates so many of its discoveries, and retrenches so many of its truths; so little is left to occupy the mind, to fill the imagination, or to touch the heart; that, when the attracting novelty and the heat of disputation are subsided, it speedily consigns its converts to apathy and indifference. He who is wont to expatiate in the wide field of revelation, surrounded by all that can gratify the

sight or regale the senses, reposing in its green pastures, and beside the still transparent waters, reflecting the azure of the heavens, the lily of the valley, and the cedar of Lebanon, no sooner approaches the confines of socinianism, than he enters on a dreary and melancholy waste. Whatever is most sweet and attractive in religion—whatever of the grandeur that elevates, or the solemnity that awes, the mind, is inseparably connected with those truths it is the avowed object of that system to subvert; and since it is not what we deny, but what we believe, that nourishes piety, no wonder it languishes under so meagre and scanty a diet. The littleness and poverty of the socinian system ultimately ensures its neglect, because it makes no provision for that appetite for the immense and magnificent, which the contemplation of nature inspires and gratifies, and which even reason itself prompts us to anticipate in a revelation from the Eternal Mind.

By stripping religion of its mysteries, it deprives it of more than half its power. It is an exhausting process, by which it is reduced to its lowest term. It consists in affirming that the writers of the New Testament were *not*, properly speaking, inspired, nor infallible guides in divine matters; that Jesus Christ did *not* die for our sins, nor is the proper object of worship, nor even impeccable; that there is *not* any provision made in the sanctification of the Spirit for the aid of spiritual weakness, or the cure of spiritual maladies; that we have *not* an intercessor at the right hand of God; that Christ is *not* present with his saints, nor his saints, when they quit the body, present with the Lord; that man is *not* composed of a material and immaterial principle, but consists merely of organized matter, which is totally dissolved at death. To look for elevation of moral sentiment from such a series of pure negations, would be "to gather grapes of thorns, and figs of thistles,"—to extract "sunbeams from cucumbers."

II. From hence we naturally remark the close affinity between the unitarian system and deism. Aware of the offence which is usually taken at observations of this

sort, I would much rather wave them, were the suppression of so important a circumstance compatible with doing justice to the subject. Deism, as distinguished from atheism, embraces almost every thing which the unitarians profess to believe. The deist professes to believe in a future state of rewards and punishments,—the unitarian does no more. The chief difference is, that the deist derives his conviction on the subject from the principles of natural religion; the unitarian from the fact of Christ's resurrection. Both arrive at the same point, though they reach it by different routes. Both maintain the same creed, though on different grounds: so that, allowing the deist to be fully settled and confirmed in his persuasion of a future world, it is not easy to perceive what advantage the unitarian possesses over him. If the proofs of a future state, upon christian principles, be acknowledged more clear and convincing than is attainable merely by the light of nature, yet, as the operation of opinion is measured by the strength of the persuasion with which it is embraced, and not by the intrinsic force of evidence, the deist, who cherishes a firm expectation of a life to come, has the same motives for resisting temptation, and patiently continuing in well doing, as the unitarian. He has learned the same lesson, though under a different master, and is substantially of the same religion.

The points in which they coincide are much more numerous, and more important, than those in which they differ. In their ideas of human nature, as being what it always was, in opposition to the doctrine of the fall; in their rejection of the Trinity, and of all supernatural mysteries; in their belief of the intrinsic efficacy of repentance, and the superfluity of an atonement; in their denial of spiritual aids, or internal grace, in their notions of the person of Christ; and finally, in that lofty confidence in the sufficiency of reason as a guide in the affairs of religion, and its authority to reject doctrines on the ground of antecedent improbability;—in all these momentous articles they concur. If the deist boldly rejects the claims of revelation *in toto*, the unitarian, by

denying its plenary inspiration, by assuming the fallibility of the apostles, and even of Christ himself, and by resolving its most sublime and mysterious truths into metaphors and allegory, treads close in his steps. It is the same soul which animates the two systems though residing in different bodies; it is the same metal transfused into distinct moulds.

Though unitarians repel, with sufficient indignation, the charge of symbolizing with deists, when advanced by the orthodox, they are so conscious of its truth that they sometimes acknowledge it themselves. In a letter to Mr. Lindsey, Dr. Priestley, speaking of the celebrated Jefferson, President of the United States when he arrived at America, says, "he is generally reported to be an unbeliever;" he adds, "but if so, you know he cannot be far from us."

(Here introduce the passages from Smith's Testimony, Vol. I.)

There was a certain period in my life when I was in habits of considerable intercourse with persons who, to say the least, possessed no belief in christianity. Of these, it was never my lot to meet with one who did not avow great satisfaction in the progress of socinianism; they appeared to feel a most cordial sympathy with it, and to view its triumphs as their own. They undoubtedly considered it as the natural opening through which men escape from the restraints of revealed religion; as the high road to that complete emancipation which awaits them in the regions of perfect light and liberty.

Whoever has attentively investigated the spirit of modern infidelity, must perceive that its enmity is pointed chiefly to those very doctrines which unitarians deny; that their dislike is not so much to the grand notion of a future state of rewards and punishments, which sober theists admit, as to the belief of the fall, and the corruption of human nature, which are professed as the basis of the doctrine of redemption. It is, as it originally was, the cross of Christ which is foolishness to these Greeks; and here our opponents are confederated with

them, and affirm themselves most faithful and zealous allies. Infidels, however they may dissent from the pretensions to a revelation, will feel no lively interest in impugning it while it imposes no necessity of believing what materially contradicts their prejudices and passions. Their quarrel is not so much with the medium of communication as with the doctrine conveyed: and here socinianism offers a most amicable accommodation, by assuring them of a future state, in which the perfections of the Supreme Being oblige him to render them eternally happy. These men are not so perverse as to feel any repugnance to a Deity who has no punitive justice, and an eternity which has no hell. It is the constant boast of our opponents, that their system gives them such an advantage in an attempt to win over infidels to the christian cause, by its being purged of those doctrines which afford the chief matter of offence; and in this representation there is doubtless some appearance of truth. But whether, upon that account, they are likely to be more successful in converting [them] than ourselves may well be made a question. For, in the first place, they will not find it so easy a task as they suppose, to convince them that the obnoxious tenets are not the doctrines of the gospel; and next, if they should succeed in this, the difference between their system and pure theism, is so slight and inconsiderable, as to make it appear a matter of great indifference which they adopt. Unless they are prepared to call in question the moral attributes of Deity and a future state, they are all in possession of the unitarian gospel already, and that by a mode of acquisition more flattering to the pride of reason. In a much vaunted seminary, or college, as it was called, established above thirty years back, for the avowed purpose of propagating unitarianism throughout the kingdom, I have the highest authority* for affirming that a great proportion of the students became sceptics and unbelievers, and of none more than from those who

* Hackney College. The authority here referred to is that of the late Dr. Abraham Rees, who was one of the professors. He made the statement to Mr. Hall in the summer of 1797.—Ed.

attended the theological lectures. Had that institution continued, it bid fair to become the most prolific hot-bed of infidelity this country ever knew. Among those who had an education completely socinian, it is matter of palpable observation, that infidelity has prevailed to a great extent; nor will the genuine tendency of that system have an opportunity of completely developing itself in this respect, until the existing generation is swept away. In the denomination where it chiefly prevails, it has recently supplanted arianism, under which the greater part of its present disciples were educated, so that its influence in the formation of character has been shared with a preceding system, which however erroneous, is far removed from that total abandonment of all the peculiarities of the gospel which is involved in the socinian creed.

Fas est et ab hoste doceri. Surely the complacency felt by the avowed enemies of the christian religion for a particular modification of it, is not without its instruction or its warning, since, allowing them the ordinary sagacity necessary to discern their own interests, we may be sure they perceive in the object of their predilection the seeds of ruin to the christian cause; that they plainly see that unitarianism is a stepping-stone to infidelity, and that the first stage of the progress facilitates and almost secures the next.

III. A third feature in the unitarian system is the unfavourable influence it exerts on the spirit of devotion. It appears to have little or no connexion with the religion of the heart. Of all high and raised affections to God, *proudly ignorant;* love to Christ, involving that ardent attachment which enthrones him in the soul, and subordinates to him every created object, it systematically explodes, under the pretence of its being either enthusiastic or impossible. Mr. Belsham, in a recent work, argues at large against indulging or pretending to indulge any particular attachment to the person of the Saviour, such as he acknowledges his immediate disciples felt, but which, according to him, is no longer the duty of christians of the present day. The only reason he

assigns for this bold assault on the most vital part of practical christianity, is the invisibility of our Saviour,—a reason urged in open contempt of the sentiments of an inspired apostle, "whom," said he, "having *not* seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."*

By parity of reason, God, who is essentially invisible, must cease to be the object of our affections; and the obligation of loving him with all our heart, and all our strength, is at once cancelled and destroyed.

The devotional feelings inculcated in the Bible, are intimately and inseparably interwoven with humility and gratitude—the humility and gratitude of a penitent and redeemed sinner. That he who is forgiven much will love much, is the decision of our Lord; while he to whom little is forgiven will love little.† But the perpetual tendency of the socinian system extenuates the evil of sin, and the magnitude of the danger to which it exposes the sinner, and is calculated to weaken, beyond expression, the force of the motives [they supply].

By asserting the intrinsic efficacy of repentance, to the exclusion of the merits of the Redeemer, it makes every man his own Saviour; it directs his attention to himself, as the source to which he ascribes the removal of guilt, and the renovation of hope; nor will it permit him to adopt, in any obvious and intelligible sense, the rapturous language of the redeemed, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Taught to consider the Lord Jesus in no other light than as the most perfect example, and the most enlightened of teachers, and believing that he has already bestowed all the benefits he is empowered to bestow, it is in vain to look for that consecration of the heart to his love, and of all the faculties of body and mind to his service, which may reasonably be expected from him who looks upon himself as a trophy of his power, and as the purchase of his blood. Not viewing himself as at any time exposed to condemnation, you must not expect him to celebrate,

* 1 Peter i. 8. † Luke vii. 47.

with elevated emotion, the riches of divine grace, much less that he should be transported with gratitude to God for the inestimable love evinced in the gift of his Son; when he considers it a high attainment to have learned that this Son is a mere man, on a level with himself. The unhappy disciple of this system is necessarily separated and cut off from the objects most adapted to touch the springs of religious sensibility. He knows nothing of a transition "from death unto life;" nothing of the anxieties of a wounded and awakened conscience, followed by "joy and peace in believing;" nothing of that "love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" nothing of the refreshing aids and consolations of that Holy Spirit whose existence he denies, whose agency he ridicules; nothing of that ineffable communion of spirit with God and the Redeemer, the true element of life and peace; nothing of the earnests and foretastes of that heaven which his system covers with a dense and impenetrable veil.

Facts, on this subject, concur with theory: for no sooner is a minister of the gospel transformed into a socinian, than he relinquishes the practice of extempore prayer, and has recourse to a written form. We are far from condemning the use of forms, where they are adopted from a conscientious preference; nor can we doubt that many members of the establishment, whose habits have combined with them the most devout associations and feelings, find them useful helps to piety. But, that those who have never used them before should find them necessary the moment they have embraced a particular system; that they should feel, as some of the most *eminent* have confessed, an absolute incapacity, from that time, of praying without the aid of a book, affords a portentous indication of the spirit of that system. To be smitten dumb and silent in the presence of that heavenly Father whom they approached before with filial freedom and confidence; to be unable or indisposed to utter a word without artificial aids, where they were wont to pour out all their hearts, evinces the visitation of a new spirit, but most assuredly not that spirit "whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Correct, elegant, spiritless—

replete with acknowledgements of the general goodness of God, the bounties of his providence, and his benign interposition in the arrangements of society, and the success of the arts and sciences which embellish and adorn the present state—seldom will you hear any mention of the forgiveness of sins, of the love of the Saviour; few or no acknowledgements of the blessings of redemption. An earthly, unsanctified tincture pervades their devotions, calculated to remind you of any thing rather than of a penitent pleading for mercy, "with groanings that cannot be uttered."

In all other dissenting communities, there are meetings for the express purpose of prayer, but has any thing of that nature ever been heard of among socinians? If they have any meetings out of the usual seasons of worship, they are debating clubs, several of which have been established among them in the metropolis on the Lord's day.

Among other dissenters, the religious observance of the Lord's day is considered as of the first importance, and he who made light of it would forfeit with them all credit for piety. Among the unitarians it is the reverse. Mr. Belsham, who seems to affect the character of their leader, has written vehemently against the observance of a Sabbath, denouncing it as one of the most pernicious of popular errors; and has lost no reputation by it.

Another of their principal writers has denounced public worship. In short, it is not easy to conjecture where these attacks will end, and whether they will suffer any of the institutions of christianity to remain unassailed.

IV. But it is time to advert to another part of the system of modern unitarianism, which, in my humble opinion, is pregnant with more mischief and danger than any of those we have just mentioned. I mean the fatalism and materialism with which, since Dr. Priestley's time, it is almost universally incorporated. The first socinians were so jealous of every opinion which might seem to infringe on the freedom of the human will and man's accountability, that they denied that the foreknowledge of God extended to human volition and

contingent events. They carried pelagianism to its utmost length. The modern socinians have been betrayed into the contrary extreme. They assert, not only that the foreknowledge of the Deity is extended to every sort of events, but that he has connected the whole series of them in an indissoluble chain of necessity; that the Deity is the efficient cause of all that takes place, of evil volitions as well as good; that he is, properly speaking, the only agent in the universe; that moral evil is his production, and his only; and that, strictly speaking, no one can be said to be accountable for any of his actions, since they were the inevitable result of necessary laws, and could not possibly have been otherwise than they were; that the human mind is a machine governed by principles to whose operations it is perfectly passive.

Who does not see that, upon this theory, the distinction between virtue and vice, innocence and guilt, is annihilated, and the foundation of rewards and punishments in a future world completely subverted? Agreeably to this, Dr. Priestley declares, in his treatise on this subject, that a perfect necessitarian, in other words, a philosopher of his own stamp, has nothing to do with repentance or remorse. Let these views of human nature prevail universally, and a frightful dissoluteness of manners, and a consequent subversion of the whole fabric of society, must infallibly ensue.

Alarming as these principles are, they form but one portion of the perilous innovations introduced by the sect of modern unitarians. With the dangerous speculations already recited, they connect the following: that the nature of man is single and homogeneous, not consisting of two component parts or principles, body and soul, matter and spirit, but of matter only; that the soul is the brain, and the brain is the soul; that nothing survives the stroke of dissolution, but that, at the moment the thinking powers of man are extinguished, all the elements of his frame are dissolved, his consciousness ceases, to be restored only at the period of the final resurrection.

From these premises it seems to be a necessary inference, that the hope of a future state of existence is entirely delusive; for, if the whole man perishes, if all that composes what I call myself is dissipated and scattered, and I cease to exist for ages as a sentient and intelligent being, personal identity is lost, and being once lost, it is impossible to conceive it ever restored without the greatest absurdity. Thus the very subject of a future life, the very thing of which it is affirmed, perishes from under us, on the unitarian hypothesis; and a future state can be predicated of any man only in a lax and figurative sense.

Matter is incessantly liable to mutation; the matter of which our bodies are composed is so eminently so, that it is generally thought by physiologists that every particle of which it is constituted disappears, and is replaced by fresh accession in the course of about seven years. Let it be admitted, then, that the constitution of human nature is homogeneous, or, in other words, that it consists of matter only, and it will necessarily follow, that in the course of forty-nine years the personal identity has been extinguished seven times, and that seven different persons have succeeded each other under the same name. Which of these, let me now ask, will be rewarded or punished in another life?

Such are the moral prodigies which disfigure the system of modern unitarianism; such the hopelessness of reconciling it with human accountability, and the dispensation of rewards and punishments in the world to come.

V. The unexampled deference it displays to human authority. This may excite surprise, because there is nothing which its abettors proclaim [with] such loud and lofty pretensions, as their unfettered freedom of thought, their emancipation from prejudice, and their disdain of human prescription. They, and they only, if we believe them, have unfurled the banners of mental independence, have purged off the slough of obsolete opinion and implicit faith, and shine forth in all the freshness, vigour, and splendour of intellectual prowess.

VI. Their rage for proselytism, difficult to be accounted for on their principles.

VI.

ON ANGELS.

Heb. i. 14.—*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

In this part of the epistle, St. Paul is engaged in establishing the superiority of our Lord Jesus Christ to angels: of this he adduces various proofs out of the ancient Scriptures: the title of Son, by which he [God] addresses the Messiah; the command he issues, when he brings him into the world, that all the angels of God should worship him: "He maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flame of fire; but of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." Nor did he ever say to the most exalted of these, "Sit on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." He then brings in the words of the text, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

As this is one of the most clear and precise accounts we meet with in the Sacred Volume, of the nature and offices of angels, it may form a proper basis for a few reflections on that subject. This account embraces two particulars:

I. They are ministering spirits.

II. They are sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation.

I. They are spirits. They have not those gross and earthly bodies which we possess; sluggish, inactive, and incapable of keeping pace with the nimble and more rapid movements of the mind.—"Who maketh his angels spirits: his ministers a flame of fire." They resemble fire in the refined subtlety of its parts, and the quickness and rapidity of its operations. They move with an inconceivable velocity, and execute their commissions with a despatch of which we are incapable of forming any [adequate] apprehension.

St. Paul styles them angels of light, probably not without a view to the ease with which they transport

themselves to the greatest distances, and appear and disappear in a moment. From their being called spirits, it is not necessary to conclude that they have no body, no material frame at all: to be entirely immaterial is probably peculiar to the Father of spirits, to whom we cannot attribute a body, without impiety, and involving ourselves in absurdities. When the term spirit is employed to denote the angelic nature, it is most natural to take it in a lower sense, to denote their exemption from those gross and earthly bodies which the inhabitants of this world possess. Their bodies are spiritual bodies, "for there is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body;" the latter of which the righteous are to receive at the resurrection, who are then to be made equal to the angels.

The passage just before adduced seems to exclude the idea of the utter absence of matter: "who maketh his angels spirits: his ministers a flame of fire."

2. These spirits are very glorious. They occupy a very exalted rank in the scale of being, and are possessed of wonderful powers. They are celebrated by the Psalmist as "those who excel in strength." To this it may be objected, that David, in describing man, represents him as made a little lower than the angels: it should, I apprehend, be rendered, "for a little time lower than the angels," that is, during the time he [the Son of God] condescended to become incarnate. Their great power is sufficiently manifest from the works they have performed by divine commission:—the destruction of the first-born of Egypt; the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah; the destruction of an hundred and eighty-five thousand men in Sennacherib's army. One angel destroyed seventy thousand men by bringing a pestilence, when David numbered the people of Israel.*

Their appearance was such as to fill the greatest of prophets with consternation and horror. "And there remained no more strength in me,† and my comeliness was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength."

* 2 Sam. xxiv. 15. † Dan. x. 8.

With ease an angel rolled away the stone, a large fragment of rock, laid at the door of our Saviour's sepulchre: and at the sight of him the Roman guard trembled, and became as dead men.

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lightened at his glory."

3. They are not less distinguished for moral excellence than by the possession of great natural powers. The usual denomination given them in the Scriptures is "*Holy* angels." They consist of such spirits as stood fast in their integrity, when many of their associates involved themselves in ruin by wilful rebellion. They are styled by St. Paul, "elect angels," who are confirmed in a state of happiness by being, along with the church, reduced under one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Their confirmation, in a state of obedience and felicity, is owing (there is every reason to conclude) to their union with him, and their being included in an eternal choice of special election and favour.

They are Christ's holy angels. To this mystery there are several allusions in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth."

II. They are ministering spirits. Their employment and office is to minister in the presence of God. Their habitation is heaven, that is, the place where God has fixed his throne and manifests his glory. They are emphatically described by this circumstance, "The angels that are in heaven." There is, doubtless, a place in the immense dominions of the Deity, where God is beheld in his glory, and where he is worshipped with the highest forms of love and adoration. "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne," &c.* Thither Jesus

* Matt. v. 34.

ascended when he left our world; there he sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high; and there it is that the holy angels reside, as their fixed habitation. From thence it was the rebellious spirits were expelled, "who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation."* "Bless the Lord, all ye his angels, that excel in strength; that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his that do his pleasure."†

Their employment is to minister to God in the exalted services of the celestial temple. This is the proper business and happiness of heaven, and in this the holy angels are habitually employed. To contemplate the perfections, to celebrate the praises of the Great Eternal; to bow before him in lowly prostrations, and to render him the honour due unto his wonderful works in nature, providence, and grace, is their proper employ. As more of God is conspicuous in the mystery of redemption than in any other work, this will occupy a proportionable part in their praises. "And I beheld," saith St. John, "and heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and around the four living creatures, and around the four-and-twenty elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

It is not for us to conceive in what particulars the services of heaven consist, after what manner the glorious Supreme will display himself, and [by] what forms of adoration he will be praised. These mysteries are hid from us; "for who hath ascended up into heaven?" Yet we may be certain they will be, in the highest degree, pure, spiritual, and sublime; the noblest exercise of the most exalted faculties on the greatest and best of Beings.

The term ministering spirits (λειτουργικὰ) [used] here, signifies that species of services which is employed in

* Jude 6. † Ps. ciii. 21.

sacred things. It is true, St. John declares, that in the New Jerusalem he saw no temple, for a temple implies a building appropriated to the worship of God, in contradistinction to the secular purposes to which other edifices are applied. In this sense there will be in heaven no temple, because the whole of those blessed regions will be filled with the immediate presence of God, and so be a temple. There was no room for a separation of any part to a sacred and religious use, when all was sacred. The reason St. John assigns for this circumstance, sufficiently explains his meaning: "And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple thereof."

On that immediate presence which fills the heavenly world, the angels are constant attendants; they continually stand before the Divine Majesty.

The most exact representation of the heavenly world, (considered as a place) that was ever given to men, was the ancient tabernacle, formed after the pattern given in the Mount.* The mercy-seat was attended with two cherubim, and the two curtains which formed the tabernacle, were filled with figures of cherubim, "With cherubim of cunning work shalt thou make them."†

In the visions of the ancient prophets, when a glimpse of heaven was given, every appearance of God was attended with creatures of an angelic order. "A fiery stream issued forth, and came forth from before him; thousands of thousands ministered unto him, ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. (Daniel.) See also Isaiah: "In the year king Uzzah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim." Ezekiel "beheld the cherubim, over which was a sapphire firmament, over which a throne was seen, and one sitting upon it like the appearance of a man, whose head was encircled with a rainbow. "This," he adds, "was an appearance of the likeness of the glory of God."

* Heb. ix. 23, 24. † Exod. xxvi. 1.

"Then the Spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a great rushing sound, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and the noise of a great rushing."*

Our Lord warns us against despising the least of those who believe on him, from this consideration, "That their angels do always behold the face of God in heaven." The angel who appeared to Zachariah, thus announces himself, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God."

Improvement of Part 1.

I. Let us reflect on the greatness of God, and the glory of Christ.

II. On the dignity of religion, considered as constituting the employment and felicity of such glorious spirits.

Second Part.

They are sent forth to minister for those who are to inherit salvation.

I. Though they are so superior, they, with much alacrity, engage in offices of love to believers, from a consideration of the dignity which awaits them; they are hastening on to possess salvation.

They (believers) are soon to be associated with them, to be sharers of their privileges, partakers of their glory, Infantine as is their present weakness, they are considerable on account of their future greatness. The infant of the family is not neglected or despised by the more advanced branches of it; they anticipate the developement of its faculties. They know the time will arrive when it will attain an equality with themselves. They that shall be thought worthy to obtain that world, at the resurrection of the just, "shall be equal to the angels."

* Ezek. iii. 12, 13.

1. Though they are now mortal, they are the heirs of immortality.

2. Though they are encompassed with infirmities and imperfections, those blessed spirits well know they will shortly become entirely like Christ.

3. Though they are immersed in trifling cares, and have necessarily much intercourse with the things of time and sense, they entertain noble thoughts, cherish high expectations, and, having the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan, earnestly desiring to be delivered. And, ever and anon wet with the dews of heaven, and anointed afresh with the Holy Spirit, they wear upon their spirits the divine impress, which these blessed spirits distinctly perceive.

II. The intimate union of believers with the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom angels are in immediate subjection, [also] entitles them to their benevolent offices. They are members of Christ, his brothers and sisters; they are taken into a still closer relation than the conjugal one: and are parts of that nature in which the Lord is glorified.

The nature of the benevolent offices [angels] perform for the church. They are not the servants of the church but the servants of Christ for the benefit of the church. Their stated employment is to minister in heaven, whence on particular occasions, they are sent on benevolent embassies for the good of the church. What are these services? What have angels done, and what are they doing for the benefit, and in behalf of the heirs of salvation?

1. The heirs of salvation are indebted to them for much prophetic information, as well as for many important directions. See Daniel. Paul going to Macedonia, Peter rescued from prison, &c.

2. The heirs of salvation have often been indebted to angelic interposition for their protection in seasons of extreme danger; for example, Daniel in the lion's den; Peter's rescue from prison; Peter and John, (see Acts v.); the deliverance of Elisha at Dothan.* "He shall give his angels charge over thee, lest thou dash thy foot

* 2 Kings vi. 15—17.

against a stone." "The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him." Many secret deliverances for which we are indebted to angelic influence.

3. The support which good men have received in the season of extreme pain and suffering. "An angel appeared unto him, strengthening him."

4. A moral influence, equal in extent, though of an opposite nature, to that which evil spirits exert.

5. To assist in dying moments; to convey the spirit to the mansions of peace; they let in those gleams of heaven into the soul, [which are then so greatly needed, and so truly refreshing.]

6. To gather the saints [together] in the presence of Christ at the last day, and to vindicate their cause, by a final victory over their enemies. "The harvest is the end of the world, and the angels are the reapers." "The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire."

Improvement.

I. How great the dignity of real christians.
II. How delightful the prospect of the heavenly world.

VII.

ON THE PERSONALITY OF SATAN.

1 Pet. v. 8.—*Your adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*

It is highly probable, independently of revelation, that there are many orders of beings superior to [man]*

* Mr. Hall preached three sermons at Leicester on the personality and agency of Satan, besides that which he introduced into his series of lectures on the Socinian Controversy. The substance of these he also condensed into a single sermon, and preached at Cambridge in October, 1823, and afterwards at Bristol. Indeed, he thought the subject of so much moment, and so strangely neglected, that he prepared his three sermons for publication; but, by some singular accident, the

To suppose our own species to be the highest production of divine power, would indicate irrational and puerile presumption. When we consider the infinite variety of creatures presented to our notice in the descending scale betwixt us and nothing, it is agreeable to analogy to conceive the number is not less of those which are above us; the probability of which is enhanced by the discoveries now made of the extent of the universe, and of the existence of bodies, compared to which the globe which we inhabit is but a spot. While there are known to be material systems immensely superior in magnitude to that with which we are conversant, what should lead us to doubt that there are, in the intellectual world, beings possessing an equal mental superiority? It surely will not be pretended that there are any properties discernible in man, that mark *him* out as the most transcendant workmanship of Deity, the masterpiece of almighty power, or that there is any ground for supposing creative energy suspended its operations here, rather than at any other point in its progress. The distance between us and nothing is finite, yet the interval is occupied and filled up with innumerable orders of sensitive beings; how improbable is it, then, that the distance between us and Deity, which is infinite, is an empty void!

Nor is it any just objection against the supposition in question, that these superior orders are not usually discernible by our senses. The information derived from our senses, aided and corrected by reflection, is a sufficient guide in the practical concerns of life; but it is a very uncertain criterion by which to determine the actual existence of things beyond a very narrow limit. Of

manuscript was lost, just as he had completed it. After an interval of three or four years, he recommenced the labour of writing these sermons, but never finished it. Some imperfect notes have been found since his death. They appear to belong to different discourses, and were evidently written at different times. Imperfect as they are, they open some interesting channels of investigation, and are therefore inserted in this collection.

For the general course of the author's reasoning, see his account of Lecture XI. in the summary of his lectures on the Socinian Controversy, page 123 of this volume.—Ed.

those that are known to exist, some beings are so minute as to elude their notice, others so vast as to exceed their grasp. There are, probably, many material substances, whose subtlety exempts them entirely from that cognizance; there are others which can only be perceived by the help of instruments.

Whether there is in the universe any being purely spiritual, and perfectly detached from matter, except the Great Supreme, is a question, perhaps, not easy to solve, nor is the solution of it at all essential to our present inquiry. God is a spirit, and we cannot conceive of any portion or modification of matter as entering into his essence, without being betrayed into contradiction and absurdity. In regard to every other class of being, it is, by many, conjectured that the thinking principle is united to some corporeal vehicle, through which it derives its perceptions, and by which it operates; while perfect spirituality, utterly separate from matter in any possible state, is the exclusive attribute of Deity. When angels are spoken of as spirits, this mode of expression may possibly denote no more than that the material vehicle with which they are united is of a nature highly subtle and refined, at a great remove from the flesh and blood which compose the bodily frame. Who will presume to set limits to the creative power in the organization of matter, or affirm that it is not, in the hand of its Author, susceptible of a refinement which shall completely exclude it from the notice of our senses? He who compares the subtlety and velocity of light with grosser substances which are found in the material system, will be reluctant to assign any bounds to the possible modifications of matter, much more to affirm there can be none beyond the comprehension of our corporeal organs.

However probable the supposition of the existence of creatures of a nature more exalted than our own, nothing can be affirmed with certainty on the subject, beyond the dictates of revelation. In regard to a class of beings, which are confessedly not objects of any of our senses, the evidence of their existence (if they exist at all) must be derived from divine testimony. Abstract reasoning,

however profound and accurate, presents nothing to the mind but the relations of its own ideas; while, for our knowledge of what exists without us, we are entirely indebted to observation and experiment. But neither observation nor experiment can extend to those departments of the universe that lie out of the reach of our senses. The province of philosophy, whether physical or mental, is to make an accurate survey of the mind and of matter, and to discover the laws to which they are subjected. To ascertain the laws of the material creation, the judicious inquirer not only diligently notices the appearances that present themselves, but puts the subject of his investigation into artificial situations, whence new appearances result; this mode of inquiry is styled experimental. In mental philosophy, a different method must be adopted. Mind cannot, like matter, be divided, compounded, or decomposed, by subjecting it to the action of external agents; and, consequently, there is here no room for experiment, properly so called. All that can be done, is carefully to observe the processes of thought and of emotion, and by attending to the operation of our mental faculties, to arrive at some general conclusions, the justice of which must, in every instance, be decided by individual consciousness.

This inconvenience, inseparable from all attempts to investigate the structure of the human mind, must, in my humble opinion, preclude the possibility of much original discovery, and will, probably, prevent metaphysics from ever obtaining the certainty and stability of science. While investigating the laws of matter, we can vary the situations in which it is placed, as much as we please [within certain practical limits], and retain it as long under our view; but mental phenomena form a Proteus, which is continually changing its aspect, and the objects of our observation are continually gliding away from us. Yet, while we acknowledge the incompetency of reason to ascertain the existence of a class of creatures superior to ourselves, and that all we can arrive at is a probable conjecture, it should be remembered that reason is equally incompetent to determine the

contrary. If it is unable to build, it is on the very same account, unable to destroy; whatever improvement philosophy may receive, however successful and brilliant its career, its conclusions, in no instance, apply to an economy which, being confessedly supernatural, is beyond its sphere, and governed by laws totally different from those which it is its business to explore.

Were all the secrets of the material world laid open, and the whole structure of the human mind, with all the laws of thought, volition, and emotion, perfectly developed and explained, we should not be a step nearer to a solution of the question under our present consideration, not at all more qualified to determine whether there be an order of superior intelligences, or what the station they occupied, or the faculties by which they were distinguished. In short, the utmost that philosophy can achieve is to make us acquainted with human creatures, and with some of the laws which govern the material and visible world. Whenever we extend our views beyond this, we have no *data* to proceed upon, [but] are all at once in the region of doubt and conjecture. It is a province to which the principles [of philosophy] cease to apply: ingenuity may amuse itself with endless suppositions, and fancy fill the void with splendid pictures; but as to discovery, the intellect of a Newton is upon the same level with that of a child.

It follows from hence that the attempt to set aside the doctrine on this subject, derived from scripture, under the notion of its being *unphilosophical*, is puerile and unmeaning. The truth is, that it is in no other sense unphilosophical, except that philosophy has nothing to do with it, that it implies a supernatural economy, to which its principles are totally inapplicable, and which it can neither affirm nor deny. Here, if any where, we must have recourse, "to the law and to the testimony;" if they speak not according to them, "there is no light in them."

Let me briefly advert, then, to the statements of the New Testament on this subject. I shall content myself with presenting the reader with a mere outline, without

attempting to exhaust the information which they impart.

The New Testament informs us, that there is an order of intelligent beings superior to the human race, which it usually designates by the name of angels, a name descriptive of their office, rather than their nature; that they are endowed with very elevated powers and capacities; that part of these, at a former [period], swerved from their allegiance to the "blessed and only Potentate," on which account they lost their first estate; that of these, one of preeminent rank and dignity took the lead in the revolt; that under the name of Satan he continues to rule the rest, who are styled his angels; that having established an infernal empire, he has ever been engaged in a malignant and implacable opposition to the will of God; that, envious of the happiness of our first parents, under the disguise of a serpent, he tempted the woman to violate the divine prohibition, by eating the forbidden fruit, whence we derived a corrupt and mortal nature; that the same evil spirit who is styled "the god of this world," the "prince of the power of the air," perpetually exerts himself in seducing men to sin; that he succeeded in effacing the knowledge of God, and establishing idolatry throughout the world; that Jesus Christ was appointed, by his divine Father, to be the antagonist of Satan, and to "destroy his works;" and that, before the close of time, his dominion will be established upon the ruin of that of Satan, and the world restored to happiness and to God. This, as it appears to me, is a fair outline of the doctrine of the New Testament on this mysterious subject. In a word, Christ and Satan are represented in the Scriptures as the heads of two opposite empires, the one the empire of light and holiness, the other of darkness and sin; the one embracing all the elements of moral good, the other all those of moral evil; while the whole human race are divided by their sway.

To a philosophical mind, not imbued with the light of revelation, such a view of the moral state of the world will, probably, appear strange and portentous; nothing

is easier than to suggest plausible objections against it. It may be admitted that it is not such a representation as reason, left to itself, would have prompted us to anticipate. This is a circumstance, however, which, in judging of [such matters], is entitled to little attention; whatever their previous improbability, they must be received or rejected according to the amount of evidence adduced for their support. Even in the affairs of ordinary life, our previous conceptions of improbability are found to afford no criterion of truth; much less can any reliance be placed on them in judging of the laws of a superior and supernatural economy.

In asserting the personality and agency of Satan, we are not, it should be remembered, proposing to our reader a speculation in philosophy; we are asserting a fact beyond the limits of its jurisdiction; a fact for which we profess to produce no other evidence besides the declarations of Scripture. If its testimony is not sufficient to decide the question, we are out at sea, nor is it possible to specify what doctrines we are warranted to receive on its authority; especially when we consider that to enlarge our knowledge of the invisible world would appear to be the proper business of a revelation, whose exclusive glory it is to bring "life and immortality to light." We have no controversy, at present, with those whose lax notions of inspiration embolden them to reject the express testimony of an apostle. We assume as granted, the truths of inspiration, so far at least that they may be safely trusted in the annunciation of christian doctrine; and all we shall attempt is to establish that literal interpretation of their language on the subject under our present consideration, wherein we infer the personal existence and agency of Satan.

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There is no necessary alliance between moral rectitude and intellectual elevation; nor need we go far in search of high intellectual vigour, combined in the same individual, with a portentous degree of pravity. In free and voluntary agents, we learn from constant observation,

that the greatest range and comprehension of intellect is no security against obliquity of will; nor is it at all certain that a preeminent degree of mental superiority may not, under certain circumstances, become itself a source of temptation. Be this as it may, the only order of rational creatures with which our experience has brought us acquainted, have, we are certain, fallen from rectitude; and therefore, whatever other conclusions we may draw from that fact, it ought, on the principles of analogy, to facilitate our belief, on proper evidence, that a similar catastrophe has involved a distinct and superior order. Whatever difficulties may accompany [the question of] the origin of evil, and however incompetent we may be to conceive how the transition is effected from innocence to guilt, or how to reconcile its foresight and permission with divine rectitude and human freedom, as this is is not the place where *they* [these difficulties] first occur, they are not entitled to be considered as objections against the doctrine which we are endeavouring to support. They exist exactly to the same extent in relation to the fall of man, of which we have experimental evidence. The doctrine which affirms the existence of evil spirits of a superior order, who have sunk themselves into perdition by disobeying their Maker, is perfectly analogous to the history of the only species of rational creatures with which we are acquainted; we find its counterpart in ourselves.

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There is one objection which has been frequently urged against the popular view of this subject, which it will be proper to notice before we proceed further in the discussion, lest the prejudice it may [excite] should impair the conviction which the evidence might otherwise produce. It has been said, that to ascribe to Satan such an interference in the moral concerns of the world, as is implied in his incessantly tempting men to sin, is to suppose him omnipresent, a supposition repugnant to the nature of a finite being. It must be confessed the Scriptures of the New Testament teach us to conceive

of satanic agency as concurring in almost every act of deliberate sin: he is said to have filled the heart of Ananias; to have entered into Judas, "after he had taken the sop;" and to be "the god of this world, who worketh mightily in the children of disobedience." To infer from thence, however, that any proper omnipresence is attributed to this apostate spirit, betrays inattention to the obvious meaning of the inspired writers.

We are taught to conceive of Satan as the head of a spiritual empire of great extent, and comprehending within itself innumerable subordinate agents. The term Satan, in application to this subject, is invariably found in the singular number, implying that there is *one* designated by that appellation. His associates in the primeval rebellion are spoken of in the plural number, and are denominated his angels. Thus the punishment reserved for them at the close of time is said to be "prepared for the devil and his angels." What their number may be it is in vain to conjecture; but when we reflect on the magnitude of the universe, and the extensive and complicated agency in which they are affirmed to be engaged, we shall probably be inclined to conjecture, that it far exceeds that of the human race.

In describing the affairs of an empire it is the uniform custom of the historian to ascribe its achievements to one person, to the ruling mind under whose auspices they are performed, and by whose authority they are effected: as it is the will of the chief which, in absolute monarchies, gives unity to its operations, and validity to its laws, and to whose glory or dishonour its good or ill fortune redound; as victories and defeats are ascribed to him who sustains the supreme power, without meaning for a moment to insinuate that they were the result of his individual agency. Thus, in relating the events of the last war, the ruler of France would be represented as conducting at once the most multifarious movements in the most remote parts of Europe, where nothing more was intended than that they were executed, directly or in-

directly, by his order. He thus becomes identified with his empire, and spoken of as though he pervaded all its parts. Thus the sovereign of Great Britain, by fiction of speech perfectly understood, is represented as the direct object of every offence, and as present in every court of law, conscience, * *
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Conceiving Satan, agreeable to the intimations of the word of God, to be the chief or head of a spiritual dominion, we easily account for the extent of the agency he is affirmed to exert, in tempting and seducing the human race; not by supposing him to be personally present wherever such an operation is carrying on, but by referring it to his auspices, and considering it as belonging to the history of his empire. As innumerable angels of light fight under the banners of the Redeemer, so, there is every reason to conclude, the devil also is assisted by an [exceedingly] numerous host of his angels, composing those principalities and powers over which Jesus Christ triumphed, in the making "a show of them openly." On this principle, the objection we are considering falls entirely to the ground, and no more ubiquity or omnipresence is attributed to Satan by our system, than to Alexander, Cæsar, or Tamerlane, whose power was felt, and their authority acknowledged, far beyond the limits of their personal presence.

The attentive reader of scripture will not fail to remark, that the statement of the existence, the moral propensities, and the agency of Satan, is extended nearly through the whole of the sacred volume, from Genesis to the Revelations; that its writers, in their portraiture of our great adversary, employ the same images, and adhere to the same appellations throughout; that a complete identity of character is exhibited, marked with the same features of force, cruelty, malignity, and fraud. He is every where depicted as alike the enemy of God and man; who, having appeared as a serpent in the history of the Fall, is recognized by St. Paul under the same

character in express allusion to that event,* and afterwards by St. John, in the apocalypse, as "that old serpent, the devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world."†

We have, therefore, just the same evidence of the real personality of Satan, as of the Holy Spirit, and exactly of the same kind; both are described by inspired persons; to both, volitions, purposes, and personal [characteristics] are ascribed. A uniformity of representation, an identity of character, distinguished respectively by the most opposite moral qualities, equally pervade the statements of scripture as to each, to such a degree, that, supposing the sacred writers to have designed to teach us the proper personality of Satan, it is not easy to conceive what other language they could have adopted. Notwithstanding, however, this accumulation of evidence, there are those who contend, that all that is said on this subject is figurative, and that the devil, or Satan, is a mere prosopopœia, or personification; but what it is designed to personify they are not agreed; some affirming one thing and some another, according to the caprices of their fancy, or the exigencies of their system. The solution most generally adopted by our modern refiners of revelation is, that Satan is a figure or personification of the principle of evil. For the benefit of the illiterate part of my audience, it may be proper to remark, that a personification is a figure of rhetoric or of poetry, by which we ascribe sentiment, language, and action, to things which, properly speaking, are utterly incapable of these: for example, Job, in a lofty strain of poetry, inquiring where is the place of wisdom; "Man," saith he, "knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. *The depth saith, It is not in me, and the sea saith, It is not with me. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.*"‡ In this bold personification of the *Depth*, the *Sea*, *De-*

* Cor. xi. 3. † Rev. xii. 9. ‡ Job xxviii. 12—14, 22.

struction, and *Death*, there is grandeur and imagination, but no obscurity; every one perceives, that in bestowing sentiment and language on these natural objects, the writer merely obeys the impulse of poetic enthusiasm. St. Paul, on several occasions, makes use of the same figure, and personifies the Law, the Flesh, and other things of an abstract nature, and no one mistakes his meaning. The legitimate use of this figure is, to give vivacity and animation to the exhibition of sentiment; every sober writer employs it sparingly and occasionally, and will rarely, if ever, have recourse to it, unless he has elevated the imagination of his reader to a pitch which prepares him to sympathize with the enthusiasm it betrays. A personification never dropt, nor ever explained by the admixture of literal forms of expression in the same connexion, is an anomaly, or rather absurdity, of which there is no example in the writings of men of sense. Of all the figures of speech by which language is varied and enriched, the personification is, perhaps, the most perspicuous; nor is there an instance to be found, in the whole range of composition, sacred or profane, in which it was so employed as to make it doubtful whether the writer intended to be understood in a literal or figurative sense. Let those who deny the existence of Satan, adduce, if they are able, another example from any author whatever, ancient or modern, sacred or profane, in which this figure is employed in a manner so enigmatical and obscure, as to have been interpreted for ages in a literal sense. There is a personification spreading itself through the whole Bible, if we believe these men, [now] discovered for the first time, in writings which have been studied by thousands, possessed of the most acute and accomplished intellect, for eighteen hundred years, without one them, during all these ages, suspecting that it existed. It is scarcely necessary to say, that a more untenable position was never advanced; nor one, which, if they really believe that the sacred writers meant to be understood figuratively, evinces a more unpardonable inattention to the operations of thought, and

the laws of composition. On any other subject but religion, such a style of criticism could not fail to expose its authors to merited derision.

But let us, for a moment, wave the other objections to this solution, and, admitting it to be possible, examine how far it will answer its purpose, by applying it to some of the principal passages which treat of the agency of Satan. It is necessary to forewarn my hearers, that the devil, or Satan, according to the notion of our opponents, is by no means a personification, universally, of one and the same thing. It is a Proteus, that assumes so many shapes as almost to elude detection. Most commonly, it denotes the principle of moral evil; sometimes, however, it stands for the heathen magistrates, sometimes for the Jewish priests and scribes, and at others, for the personal opponent of St. Paul at Corinth.

Let us first apply this solution to our Lord's temptation in the wilderness. "Then," says Matthew, "was Jesus led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."* This, our opponents tell us, with great confidence, was a visionary scene, and their reason for it is curious enough. It is the form of the expression, "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness." Mark has it, "sendeth him into the wilderness."† On this principle of interpretation, whatever is represented as performed by Christ under the agency of the Spirit, must be understood as visionary; and when it is said, "he entered in the power of the Spirit into Galilee," it must be understood as intending not a real, but a fictitious or visionary removal. It is true that Ezekiel speaks of himself as brought to Jerusalem, in order to witness the abominations practised there, while it is evident his actual abode was still in Babylon; but, that no mistake may arise, he repeatedly assures us, that it was in the visions of God. But no such intimation is given in the instance before us. It has all the appearance of a literal matter of fact, and as such it has been currently received by the church of God. Let it be admitted, however, for

* Matt. iv. 1. † Mark i. 12.

argument's sake, to have been a visionary representation; the question still recurs, What is meant by the tempter in this scene? and whether any of the solutions which have been given can possibly be admitted. The devil here cannot be intended to denote the pagan magistrates, or Jewish high-priests, or scribes, because our Lord was alone. As little can it mean the principle of evil. The principle of evil must be the principle of some mind; it cannot subsist apart. Where, in this instance, is the mind in which it inhered? None were present but the Saviour and the tempter; if the tempter was not a person, but the principle of evil, that principle must have belonged to the Saviour himself; it must have consisted of some sinful bias, some corrupt propensity in himself, with which he maintained an arduous struggle. But this is refuted by the concurrent testimony of the sacred writers, who affirm him to be "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners;"* who emphatically designate him under the character of him "that is holy, him that is true."† It is to be hoped that our modern socinians have not rushed to that extreme of impiety to impute a principle of evil to the mind of the immaculate Lamb of God, "in whom was no sin."‡ And yet, without this, no intelligible account can be given of the temptation, except that which has been universally received in the church.

Let us apply their theory to another very important passage in the sixth chapter of the Ephesians. We there find the following exhortation: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." By these principalities and powers, our modern socinians tell us we are to understand a general personification of all wicked opposition to the progress of christianity, whether from the civil or

* Heb. vii. 26 † Rev. iii. 7. ‡ 1 John iii. 5.

ecclesiastical power, and, in the present instance, more particularly, "the opposition of Jewish priests and rulers."* But how, we ask, is this comment consistent with the negative branch of St. Paul's assertion, "for we wrestle not with flesh and blood?" Flesh and blood is a very common form of expression in the sacred writings, employed to denote the human race, or mankind. Thus our Lord tells Peter, "flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven;"† evidently intending to affirm, that he did not derive his information from men, but from God. "Immediately," says Paul, "I consulted not with flesh and blood;"‡ that is, he consulted no human authorities; "nor did I go up to Jerusalem," he adds, "to those that were apostles before me." The first part of the apostle's proposition then evidently is, that the opposition he had chiefly to sustain was not from men, nor from adversaries of the human rank and order. The question naturally arises, From what then? He adds, "from principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world," or, according to Griesbach, "of this darkness;" that is, say the unitarians, from Jewish rulers and priests. We must perceive in a moment the absurdity of the proposition thus interpreted, where that is denied at the beginning which is affirmed at the close: and human nature, expressed by a general term which can signify nothing else, is formally excluded from the context, to make way for a class of adversaries who are of that very nature, and no other.

It is equally impossible to put the other construction on the passage, that of the principle of evil; because that cannot admit of the plural number. It will surely be allowed that no intelligent writer, who was desirous of personifying the principle of evil, abstractedly considered, would speak of it in the plural form, under the figure of "principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world," since such a mode of speaking could be productive of nothing but mental confusion. This

* Improved Version, p. 450. † Matt. xvi. 17. ‡ Gal. i. 16.

passage, therefore, affords an irrefragable proof of the existence and agency of Satan.

Let us proceed to apply the principle of our opponents to another passage, and inquire, whether it be possible to elicit from it a sense worthy of the wisdom of inspiration. The passage to which I refer is in the first Epistle of John, the third chapter: "My little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous: he who committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil hath sinned from the beginning: for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." Let us for a moment suppose, with the unitarians, that the devil is here put for a personification of the principle of evil, or of sin. And what, let me ask, can be more trite, futile, and ridiculous, than gravely to assert, that the principle of evil, or sin, sinned from the beginning? Who needed to be informed of this? And what sense can we affix to the phrase, "from the beginning"? which, if it conveys any idea at all, must be intended to instruct us, that the principle of sin did not begin to be sinful from a late or recent, but from a certain very distant epoch, denoted by the words, "the beginning." But is not this more like the babbling of an infant, than the dictates of divine inspiration?

The following passage of John is [beset] with precisely the same difficulties. "Ye," said our Lord, addressing the unbelieving Jews, "are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it."* Here, on the hypothesis of our opponents, we find our Saviour labouring to convince his hearers that the principle of evil, or sin, has been guilty of certain specific enormities, such as murder and lying; that it did not continue in a state of moral rectitude, because there is no rectitude in it. Nothing can be more trifling; since, when the very

* John viii. 44.

principle of evil in the abstract is under contemplation, every partial kind of evil is, *ipso facto*, included. Had our Lord discoursed in this manner, it might very properly have been said of him, in a sense very different from that which was originally intended, "never man spake like this man."

The legitimate employment of a prosopopœia, or personification, requires that the literal term, expressive of the passion or principle personified, be strictly adhered to. He who wishes to personify piety, patriotism, or benevolence, is never accustomed to drop the literal term by which these principles are respectively denoted. He gives sex, sentiment, and language to each, but on no occasion shall we find him substituting an unusual name for the things which he intends to personify. To change the very terms themselves for certain symbolical appellations, would have the effect of involving his discourse in incomprehensible mystery: it would be introducing an enigma, not a personification. Where shall we find a parallel in the whole compass of the Bible for such a licentious abuse of personification? Besides, allowing that this absurd kind of personification could be at all tolerated, the symbolical name ought, at least, to have a determinate meaning; it should invariably stand for one and the same thing. The change of the proper term, for the name of a symbolical personage, could be justified on no other principle than that it was universally understood to be the substitute of some one object; but in the present case, the word Satan has no precise or definite idea attached to it; it is sometimes the principle of evil, sometimes the Jewish priests and rulers, at others, the pagan magistrates. How [repugnant to every sound principle of interpretation!]

VIII.

ON THE EXTREME CORRUPTION OF MANKIND BEFORE THE GENERAL DELUGE.

Gen. vi. 11.—*The earth was corrupt before God, and was filled with violence.*

The account in the Scriptures of the history of the world before [the flood] is extremely concise, but, at the same time, extremely interesting. Of the celebrated personages that then flourished, the names are seldom mentioned, and the transactions in which they were engaged, are not specified with any detail of circumstances. The inhabitants of the old world are involved in [obscurity]; they are made to pass before us like the shade of departed greatness, with an infallible judgement only passed by their Creator on their characters, and a distant declaration of their doom; as though it were the determination of God's providence to bury their memory in oblivion, and to make nothing distinctly legible but their destruction. Of the violences they committed, of the impiety they uttered, and of the miseries they mutually inflicted upon each other, the Holy Ghost condescends to give no particulars, but only stigmatizes them as atrocious criminals and rebels, whose enormous guilt exhausted the patience of their Maker, and rendered them unfit to live.

The same history informs us of a most atrocious murder, committed by the first-born man upon his brother, for no other reason than that he was wicked and his brother righteous. Such an event affords a view of human nature, in the early stage of its existence, which prepares us for the description given of human depravity in the context, "and the Lord looked, and beheld that every thought of the imagination of man's heart was evil, and that continually."* It was necessary explicitly to state the extreme degeneracy into which mankind were fallen, in order to justify the conduct of God in

* Gen. vi. 5.

bringing upon them the flood. For God to destroy the work of his hand,—to destroy that part of it which was made after his own image, was a most extraordinary measure in the conduct of providence, which nothing can account for but that extreme corruption which it is affirmed then overspread the world. In what that corruption particularly consisted; whether it involved the apostatizing from God to idols, or only manifested itself in gross acts of immorality; how long it had been accumulating ere it reached its height; and whether it was gradually or by sudden steps introduced; are circumstances of which we are not informed. All that we are expressly told is, that the earth was filled with injustice, rapine, and violence. From what we know of human nature and human affairs, we have reason to conclude that it was gradually superinduced, since great changes in the moral state of the world, whether in the way of improvement or deterioration, require a considerable space of time for their accomplishment. It is, on this account, next to impossible not to suppose, that the extreme degradation of manners under consideration was produced by slow degrees, and was affected by various causes. Some of these causes are, if I mistake not, suggested with tolerable clearness in the chapter out of which my text is taken.

We might with great truth assert, that the general cause of the extreme corruption then prevalent, was the defection of our first parents, and that consequent loss of true rectitude and holiness which they first sustained in their own persons, and then communicated to their posterity. This tendency to sin in human nature is, indeed, the prolific source of all particular vices, which flow from thence as their fountain. But, as a river, when it overflows its banks, must be swelled by accelerated floods or tributary streams, besides what it derives from its parent spring, so an extraordinary prevalence of vice, at a particular time, necessarily implies the cooperation of other causes, along with the original corruption of human nature. To say there is an inherent sinful bias in human nature, is sufficient to account for the

existence of a large portion of corruption at any time, but affords no reason for its prevailing at one time more than another. To account for such an event satisfactorily, some specific and particular reasons must be assigned besides this general one.

The purport of the remaining part of this discourse is to point out what may appear some of the probable reasons, and to deduce a few practical inferences from the whole.

Let me request your attention while I state some of the particular reasons which account for the remarkable and prodigious corruption which prevailed in the lives of men immediately before the flood.

I. It may be partly ascribed, with great probability, to the neglect and abandonment of the public worship of God. From the fact of Cain and Abel both presenting their offerings to the Lord, and from the acceptance of Abel's offering, because offered with faith, we may infer, that some time after the fall a mode of worshipping God was divinely prescribed, or how could Abel exercise faith in sacrificing; since faith implies, invariably, a divine testimony, or some divine interposition? We are further informed, respecting Cain, that, when the Lord remonstrated with him on the murder of his brother, he sentenced him to be a wanderer and vagabond; and Cain, deploring the severity of his sentence, said, "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid." It is added, "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden."*

As his going out from the presence of the Lord is immediately followed by the declaration of his dwelling in a strange land, it is natural to suppose that the former expression denotes his quitting that country which God was *wont* in a peculiar manner to honour with his presence; where he afforded some spiritual manifestation of his power and glory.

* Gen. iv 14—16.

It seems, in or near the place where Adam and his sons dwelt, there was placed the shadow, or some bright and visible token, of the divine presence. The same is implied in the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, and the rejection of Cain's; for how could the former know that his was accepted, or the latter, that his was rejected, without some supernatural sign or token? Cain thus having, by the atrocious crime he committed, forfeited the privilege of approaching the place of divine audience; and going into a remote part where no such symbol of the divine presence was possessed, fell, in all probability, into total neglect of the public worship of God, and abandoned himself entirely to an irreligious and worldly life. Supposing this to be the case, it will readily account for much of that prodigious vice and impiety: for when once the worship of God is abandoned, a great restraint upon wickedness is removed out of the way. Conceive only to what a dreadful degeneracy of morals would this nation speedily advance, if no attention were paid to the sabbath, and public worship universally abandoned. The extreme importance of this duty, as a chief preservative of all religion and virtue, may be learnt from one remarkable passage in the writings of Paul: "Forget not the assembling of yourselves together," says he, "as the manner of some is:" "for if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin."* Whence we may infer, that to forsake public worship is either precisely the same thing as absolute apostasy, or is the very next step to it.

II. The intermarriages betwixt the "seed of the righteous and the seed of the wicked," were, undoubtedly, another principal cause of the extreme corruption under consideration. "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all that they chose."† To understand the

* Heb. x. 25, 26. † Gen. vi. 1, 2.

meaning of this passage, which at first sight appears obscure, we must look a little further back in the narrative. We are there informed, that to Seth, the third son of Adam, was born a son, named Enos; it is added, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."* The meaning of the inspired writer is, that in the days of Enos, the son of Seth, the first separation was made betwixt the true worshippers of God and the profane descendants of Cain and his associates. Adam, we learn, had sons and daughters born to him after the birth of Seth, but their names are not mentioned, partly because the true religion was preserved in the line of Seth, and partly because from him was continued the succession of patriarchs till Noah. The family of Seth, on account of its adherence to the true religion, were styled "the sons of God;" the descendants of Cain, and the other branches of the family, who united with him in his impiety, "the sons of men," denoting, that they were a carnal, irreligious race. The words rendered, "then began men to call upon the name of the Lord," may with equal propriety be rendered, "then began men to be called by the name of the Lord." Those, then, were the persons whom the sacred writer denominates "the sons of God;" a race of men descended from Seth, who kept themselves apart, and refused affinity or connexion with the apostates from the religious worship of God. Among them was found the true church; the holy seed, whence the New World was to spring up after the flood; the sacred stock, out of which Christ himself was to arise.

While they kept themselves apart, and declined to unite with the apostate stock, religion continued in its purity, the overflowings of vice were restrained, and they were as "the salt of the earth." In process of time they yielded to the suggestions of carnal appetite, broke through the restraints of piety and prudence, and joined in affinity with the descendants of Cain and the other branches of the family, who followed his apostasy.

* Gen. iv. 26.

Tracing the almost necessary effects of such a proceeding, the children of Israel at a subsequent period were strictly forbidden to contract marriages with the Canaanitish and surrounding nations. "Take heed to thyself lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee:—and thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods."* In the same spirit, and for the same reason, the apostle enjoins upon christians the avoiding of such unequal marriages: "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath Christ with Belial? or what communion hath light with darkness? or what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"†

III. The pride arising from the possession of great bodily strength, and great mental acquisitions and endowments, may be assigned as another cause of the remarkable corruption of men's manners in the times immediately preceding the flood. "There were giants in those days," says the sacred text; "and, moreover, when the sons of God, allying themselves to the daughters of men, had children born unto them, the same became mighty men, even men of renown."‡ The consciousness of superior or supernatural strength, in persons who are not tinctured with the fear of God, naturally disposes to a degree of violence and oppression; and that those giants, of whom Moses spoke, abused their prodigious strength to those purposes, *is evidently* [implied] in the sacred story. The strong oppressed the weak, and made the superiority of bodily force an instrument for establishing unjust domination and tyranny, until the whole earth became a scene of rapine, cruelty, and injustice.

But, besides these, it is evident, from the narrative, that the descendants of Cain distinguished themselves very early by the discovery and cultivation of arts and

* Exod. xxxiv. 12, 16. † 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15. ‡ Gen. vi. 4.

sciences; both these took their first rise among that godless race. Tubal Cain instructed in every artifice of iron and brass, and, probably, was the first inventor of warlike instruments. Jubal was the inventor of musical instruments, or, to speak in the language of scripture, "the father of all them that handled the harp and the organ." Naamah, from the manner in which she is introduced, was, probably, the inventress of some of the more exquisite kinds of needle-work. The first thing we are informed of respecting Cain, after the murder of his brother, is, his building a city, which he called Enoch, after the name of his son. From the whole narrative it may be confidently inferred that the descendants of Cain were endowed with a superior genius, and were the first who made themselves celebrated by the discovery and improvement of arts and sciences. Superior genius, united with extraordinary attainments, are, in themselves, valuable gifts; but when they are dissevered from the fear of God, nothing tends more powerfully to intoxicate and corrupt the heart. These envenom it with pride, these supply the sophistry which supports impiety, and extend the means and enlarge the capacity of doing mischief. They have a peculiar tendency to produce that confidence in human reason, that reliance on arms of flesh, which indisposes man to seek after God. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God."* From the history of modern times, we have abundant evidence, that great improvements in arts and sciences have not only no harmonizing or beneficial influence on irreligious minds, but that they have often just the contrary. Whenever God is not made the final end of all knowledge and of all talent, they lead the possessor further and further from him, and are the mere instruments and embellishments of vice, and serve merely to paint and adorn the sepulchre where virtue lies entombed. The descendants of Cain, like too many in the present day, were, indeed, men of renown; but, seeking this as the supreme good,

* Psalm x. 4.

and despising the honour that comes from above, they could possess no solid worth, and whatever there was that might bear the appearance of it amongst them, was hollow and insincere.

IV. I add, in the last place, their extraordinary longevity as another reason of the prodigious depravity which prevailed at that time. The lives of many of them, we learn, extended to nearly a thousand years. This remarkable circumstance, cooperating with the causes I have already mentioned, contributed greatly to the excessive corruption asserted in the text. It must have acted powerfully in several ways.

1. He who can indulge a reasonable expectation of living for a very long period in the world, considers himself as possessing a large estate. The value of any earthly possession rises, partly in proportion to the satisfaction it is capable of affording, and partly from its duration, Man, being naturally a prospective being, a being who looks forward to futurity, is, necessarily, more attached to every species of good, in proportion to its real or imagined permanence. How powerfully, then, must sensible and visible objects have attracted the heart of those who had a reasonable prospect of enjoying them for a thousand years! The possessions which attach us to the present world must have operated, in such circumstances, with a prodigious force. . .

2. Corrupt habits must, through such a long track of years, have had opportunity to fix themselves more thoroughly, to strike their roots more deeply, than during the contracted space of present existence.

3. The longevity of the antediluvians removed eternity to a greater apparent distance, and, therefore, naturally weakened its effects. If men put off the thoughts of death and eternity when they have such a short space to live as they have at present, how difficult would it be to impress [them] with a serious or alarming apprehension of it at the distance of a thousand years!

* * * * *

IX.

ON THE END OF MAN'S EXISTENCE.

Ezek. xv. 2.—*What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest?*

The vine-tree is weaker than most trees, so as to be unfit for any work, and would therefore be very contemptible but for that property it possesses of bringing forth a valuable and delicious fruit. On this account it is highly prized, and diligently cultivated. But if it fail of producing fruit, the only purpose to which it can be applied, is to turn it to fuel. Such is the figurative representation which the prophet gives us, in this passage, of man, considered especially as the object of divine care and culture. He is naturally capable of yielding a precious fruit; in this consists his sole excellency; this is the sole end of his existence; and if he fails in this, he is of no use but to be destroyed.

I. Man is naturally capable of yielding a most precious fruit: this fruit consists in living to God.

1. He is possessed of all the natural powers which are requisite for that purpose. He is endowed with reason and understanding, enabling him to perceive the proofs of the being of God, and to entertain just, though inadequate, conceptions of the principal attributes of his nature; his self-existence, his absolute perfection, his power, his wisdom, his all-sufficiency, his omnipresence, his holiness, justice, and goodness. Inferior animals do not; on which account he is a vine-tree amongst the trees of the wood; inferior in many properties to some of them, but superior in those particulars which fit him for this end, and on that account incomparably more valuable.

2. As we are possessed of natural powers, fitting us for the service of God, so he has bestowed upon us much care and culture, with an express view to this end. The religious instruction he gave to his ancient people, is frequently compared in scripture to the cultivation

which men bestow upon vines. "My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill," &c.* "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant."† He gave them his will, his ordinances, his prophets, and separated them from all nations by peculiar rites, that they might be to him for a name, and a praise, and a peculiar treasure, above all nations. He has done much more for us under the gospel. None can be ignorant of the intention of God in all these provisions. "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou now turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?"‡

II. This is the only end for which mankind are formed and preserved; this is the proper fruit of human nature, which admits of nothing being substituted in its room.

1. A mere selfish, voluptuous life, cannot be supposed to be the proper fruit of human nature. He who lives to himself is universally despised and condemned. "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth to himself."|| "For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter."§

2. A life of social benevolence, in which the public good is preserved, without a supreme regard to God, cannot be this fruit. Can such persons be said to neglect the end of their existence? Undoubtedly; for the following reasons:

(1.) To do good to our fellow-creatures, without regard to God, is to forget the principal relation in which we stand, and, consequently, to neglect the principal duty. A right behaviour to each other is no proper compensation for the want of obedient regards to God: (instanced in pirates and rebels.) A regard to God is the root and origin of all real virtue.

(2.) The end of man's existence cannot, with any

* Isaiah v. 1. † Isaiah v. 7. ‡ Jer. ii. 21.
|| Hos. x. 1 § Deut. xxxii. 32.

propriety, be considered as confined to this world; but the proper end accomplished by mere social virtues, is entirely confined to the present state.

(3.) No collective number of men can be independent of God, more than a single individual; therefore no such collective body has a right to consult their common interest, to the neglect of God, any more than a single individual to pursue his individual interest. The aggregate of mankind appears something great and imposing in the eyes of men; in consequence of which a peculiar importance is attached to those actions which tend to the public good. The magnitude of the general interest, imposes a value on those actions which are adapted to advance so great an object. But, in the sight of God, all nations are as the "drop of a bucket;" "he taketh up the isles as a very little thing." Suppose all the subjects of a lawful prince were to agree to stand by each other, and to promote each other's interest to the utmost; would this be allowed by the prince as any atonement for a great and persevering rebellion? Or suppose a single individual so disposed, would not the result be the same? No other can be substituted for this.

III. He who answers not the end of his existence, is fit only to be destroyed. He is like a vessel marred in the hand of the potter, proper only to be broken.

The barren vine may be useful as fuel, and to this purpose it is much applied in eastern countries. Thus wicked men may be useful with a subordinate kind of usefulness, by their destruction.

1. They may thereby become edifying examples of the just vengeance of God, in order to deter others. That this will be one of the ends answered by the punishment of the wicked, seems intimated in several passages of scripture, as well as is supported by its analogy to human government. "And they shall go forth and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."*

* Isaiah lxvi. 24.

2. They will serve to manifest those attributes of the Great Supreme which their conduct disowned, and which it seemed virtually to call in question. "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?"* This is a subordinate use, not a primary end. It is that for which men fit themselves, by their presumptuous and impenitent neglect of God.

(1.) What blindness attaches to those who live in the total neglect of God and religion!

(2.) What little room is there for that confidence which many place in correctness of deportment towards their fellow-creatures, while religion is not even pretended to be the governing principle of their lives!

(3.) What need have we all to examine ourselves, and seriously to inquire, whether we are yielding that fruit unto God, on which we have been insisting!

(4.) How ought those to be alarmed, when the result of such examination is, that they have been hitherto utterly without fruit! How strong the obligations on such, after considering their ways, to turn unto the Lord. And thankful should they be that space is afforded them for repentance and salvation!†

X.

CLAIMS OF THE FLESH.

Rom. viii. 12.—*Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.*

It is of great importance for us to ascertain, not only the quality of particular actions, but the general princi-

* Rom. ix. 22.

† Preached on the morning of Sunday, October 31, 1814, at Leicester.

ple on which our life is regulated; since it is this that must determine our true character in the sight of God. As there are but two sorts of persons in the world, the righteous and the wicked, the carnal and the spiritual, so there are only two grand principles which respectively actuate these two classes of mankind, and produce all that diversity of character by which they are distinguished. In the context, they are characterized with such perspicuity and precision, that it is not difficult to decide to which we belong. The one are described as enslaved, the other as free; the one as being in the flesh, and "minding" the things of it; the other as inhabited and actuated by the Spirit; the former as the heirs of death; the latter as the joint-heirs with the Lord of a happy immortality. The text we have chosen for our present meditation, is a legitimate inference, deduced by the inspired writer from the premises he had been laying down; it is a conclusion at which he arrives, resulting from the views which he had been exhibiting of the condition and expectation of two opposite descriptions of persons. "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh."

I shall endeavour in the first place to settle the meaning of the terms *flesh* and *Spirit*, employed in the context, in order to a right conception of the import of the proposition; and in the second place, compare and adjust the opposite claims of the flesh and of the Spirit.

1. Flesh most properly denotes the *body*, in contradistinction from the soul: the matter of which the corporeal structure is formed: "there is one flesh of men."* And,

2. As all men are possessed of this, it is by an easy figure of speech applied to denote human nature, or mankind universally. "The end of all flesh is come before God."†

3. Because the fleshly or corporeal part of our nature may be perceived by the eye, it is sometimes used to denote *that* in religion which is merely outward and

* 1 Cor. xv. 39. † Gen. vi. 13.

ceremonial. Thus St. Paul says, "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye made perfect by the flesh?"* Thus the same apostle speaks of "carnal ordinances."†

4. On account of the deep and universal corruption of human nature, and this corruption displaying itself in a peculiar manner, in producing an addictedness to the indulgence of bodily or fleshly appetites, the term flesh is frequently used to denote moral corruption, or human nature considered as corrupt. It is manifest, from the consideration of the context, that this is the sense in which it is to be taken here. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh;"‡ that is, corrupt and sinful. In this sense of it the works of the flesh are contrasted by St. Paul with the fruits of the Spirit. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like."§ From the extent of the enumeration, which comprehends many mental vices, it is manifest nothing less can be intended by the term *flesh* than the principle of corruption, the dictates of unrenewed nature. By the *Spirit*, it is plain we are not to understand the immaterial principle in man, but the blessed Spirit of God, the author of all holiness. This is evident from the context.

Secondly. As they divide mankind betwixt them, and every man walks according to the dictates of the one or the other, they are considered as competitors. We shall examine and adjust their respective claims, that we may discern to which the preference is due, and come then fully to acquiesce in the decision of the apostle: "Therefore we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh."

There is an ellipsis in the text, which must be supplied from the train of thought in the context.

Let us examine the claims of the flesh, or of corrupt nature.

* Gal. iii. 3. † Heb. ix. 10.
‡ John iii. 6. § Gal. v. 19–21.

We may conceive the flesh pleading ancient possession. The pleasures and freedom from restraint attending a compliance with her dictates. The general usage and course of the world, which she reminds us has been such in every age. That the far greater part of mankind have been under her sway, the greatest of men not excepted, so that she can number nobles among her vassals, and among her subjects the princes of the earth. The most distinguished by their birth, their talents, or their fortune, she may allege, never dreamed of an exemption from her dominion, never thought of any other method of life, than that of living after the *flesh:* faithful to her dictates through the whole of their lives, they bowed submissive at her shrine, were initiated into her mysteries, and died in her communion. Notwithstanding these specious pleas, however, we shall see sufficient cause to decline her yoke, and to come to the apostolic conclusion, if we take the following things into our consideration.

I. Its claims are founded upon usurpation; they rest on no basis of equity. It alienates the property from its lawful possessor; it interferes with a prior claim, which nothing can fairly defeat. Sin, considered as a master, does not enter upon a property that is derelict or abandoned by its owner; but it attempts to occupy and appropriate what the proprietor never meant to resign, what he never can resign without irreparable injury to his honour. The souls of men are the most valuable part of his possessions below, and the most capable, indeed in one sense they alone are capable, of glorifying his perfections.

1. Let us consider that the Lord is our Maker, and we the work of his hands; it is "he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein."* The noble powers, by which we are so highly distinguished from the inferior parts of the

* Isaiah xlii. 5.

creation, the powers of thought, and reason, and conscience, are of his production; from him they are derived, and by him they are sustained. His right in us is, consequently, more extensive than it is possible for us to conceive in any other instance, because none else ever gave existence to the smallest particle of dust in the balance; it is incomparably more than that, to which it is compared, of the potter over the clay. Whatever claim interferes, then, with his dominion over us, must be founded in absolute injustice, without the guilt of which it is impossible to withhold any thing from him; and it is injustice of the worst description, for it is robbing God, "Will a man rob God?" exclaims the prophet: "yet ye have robbed me, saith the Lord, in tithes and offerings."* But what are tithes and offerings compared to that love, adoration, and obedience, in which, even while they were enjoined, all their value consisted, and which are of perpetual obligation when they cease any longer to be enjoined? Nor does the dominion of God rest only on his power as a Creator; it claims our submission, also, on the ground of those transcendent perfections and excellencies which belong essentially to the blessed God, and the exercise of which is inseparable from his administration. By virtue of these, he is the sovereign good, the only good; for strictly speaking, "there is none good but God;" the infinite, the absolute, the unchanging, the satisfying, the all-comprehending good; so that whatever appears beautiful or glorious among the creatures, is but an efflux from his fulness, the faint reflection of his glory.

2. If we reflect on the powers with which we are endued, we cannot suppose that they are formed for no other end than the indulgence of carnal appetites, the amassing of riches, the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, or the procuring honours and distinctions from our fellow-worms. We shall be at no loss to perceive a strange disproportion between such powers and such pursuits, and that they cannot be confined to them without de-

* Mal. iii. 8.

scending unspeakably beneath our level, without a base forgetfulness of ourselves as well as of God, and a voluntary dereliction of our rank. Jeremiah, when he witnessed the ruin and desolation of his country, beheld with astonishment those that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills; a deplorable, but an involuntary degradation. But this we are now speaking of is chosen and voluntary; these dunghills, for such are the highest forms of created good when compared with the blessed God, are embraced with appetite and desire.

3. If God were disposed to relinquish his claim, the usurpation of another master might be yielded to with the more plausible pretence: but this is not the case. If we believe his word, he never means to part with his right over his creatures. "If I am a father, where is my reverence? if I am a master, where is my fear?"* We cannot suppose, without the utmost absurdity, he will ever divest himself of his authority; which he could never do without impairing his dignity and introducing confusion into his empire. He owes it to himself not to relinquish what we owe to him. The claims of the flesh, then, are founded on plain and direct usurpation.

II. Let us next examine the claims of the flesh by what we have already derived from it. Let us see whether it is such a master as deserves to be served any longer. Of the boasted pleasures it has afforded, say christians, what remains but a painful and humiliating remembrance? "What fruit had ye in those things of which ye are now ashamed?" Has any thing accrued to you from the service of sin, which you would wish to renew? Though it might flatter your imagination with the appearance of good, did it not afterwards "bite as a serpent and sting as an adder?" You remember the wormwood and the gall you were made to taste, when you were first convinced of its evil: and you know what a bitter and evil thing it is to depart from the living God. It has already brought you to the brink of de-

* Mal. i. 6.

struction; it has placed you in a situation in which nothing but the interposition of sovereign mercy could have saved you. By estranging you from God, it shut up the path to real good. In your unconverted state, it indisposed you to prayer, armed you with prejudice against the salutary truths of the gospel, darkened your understanding, and seared your conscience. Such was its deceitfulness, that you were led by it to put "evil for good, and good for evil; sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet." Your ears were closed to the voice of the charmer, charmed he never so wisely. You were made to fancy that true religion was melancholy, that tenderness of conscience was needless scrupulosity, and that happiness was only to be found in the pleasures and pursuits of this world. It engaged you in the chase of innumerable vanities. You "followed after your lovers, but could not overtake them;" fled from one refuge to another, till, to speak in the language of the prophet, "You were wearied in the multitude of your way." In the meantime, to all pleasant and delightful intercourse with the Father of spirits, to the soothing accents of peace and pardon issuing from Christ, and to all the consolations of piety, you were utter strangers. In your more serious and reflecting moments, your heart meditated terror; death, judgement, and eternity, were awful sounds in your ears, and you only felt a delusive and sickly repose, while you forgot they had any existence. On a calm review of your conduct, you felt an uneasiness, which you were conscious was so just and well founded, that you seldom dared to reflect. Surely you will acknowledge, that you, at least, are not debtors to the flesh. And what has the flesh to plead for its services, which will bear for a moment to be weighed against these great evils? What has Satan to plead, who, by means of it, "rules in the children of disobedience?" Will he venture to mention a few vain and sinful amusements, a wanton arbitrary liberty, or a few transient guilty pleasures, which, I trust, you are so far from wishing to repeat, that you never think of them

without blushing before God? How are you more indebted to the flesh, since you had reason to hope you formed a saving acquaintance with God? The partial indulgence to its dictates has robbed you of your comfort, has retarded your progress to heaven, and made you pass many a day sad and disconsolate, when, but for this, the joy of the Lord would have been "your strength."

The more we observe what passes around us with a serious mind, the more we shall be convinced how little men are indebted to the flesh. Look at that young man, the early victim of lewdness and intemperance, who, though in the bloom of life, has, "his bones filled with the sins of his youth." Survey his emaciated cheek, his infirm and withered frame, and his eyes sunk and devoid of lustre; the picture of misery and dejection. Hear his complaint, how he mourns at the last, now his flesh and his body are consumed: "How have I hated instruction and my heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to them that instructed me!—I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation of the assembly." Is *he* a debtor to the flesh? Behold that votary of the world, successful as he has been in the pursuit of it, and stained by no flagrant crime. Yet he has lived "without God in the world;" and now his days are drawing to a close, he feels himself verging to the grave, and no hope animates, no pleasing reflection cheers him. The only consolation he receives, or rather, the only relief of his anguish, is in grasping the treasures he must shortly quit. Is *he* a debtor to the flesh?

III. We shall examine the claims of the flesh by the aspect they bear on our future interests. Before we engage in the service of a master, it is reasonable to inquire into the advantages he stipulates, and the prospects of futurity attendant upon his service. In the ordinary concerns of life, we should consider the neglect of such an inquiry chargeable with the highest imprudence. Dreadful is it, in this view, to reflect on the consequences

inseparably annexed to the service of corruption. "If ye live after the flesh," says the apostle, "ye shall die"* "The wages of sin is death."† And, to demonstrate the close and unavoidable connexion subsisting between them, he adds, "If ye sow to the flesh, ye shall of the flesh reap corruption."‡ It is not an incidental connexion, it is an indissoluble one, fixed in the constitution of things. "Lust, when it is conceived, bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."§ If we live in the indulgence of carnal appetites, if we comply habitually with the dictates of corrupt nature; the word of God has assured us of what will follow: "The end of these things is death."‖ "Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience."¶ "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."** For this reason we can never be debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh; the very reason assigned in the clause immediately following the text. We can never be under obligations to obey such a master, who rewards his services with death; death, spiritual and eternal. The fruits of sin, when brought to maturity, are corruption: his most finished production is death; and the materials on which he works the fabric of that manufacture, if we may be allowed so to speak, consist in the elements of damnation. To such a master we can owe nothing but a decided rejection of his offers, a perpetual abhorrence, and an awful fear of ever being deceived by his stratagems, or entangled in his snares.

* Rom. viii. 13. † Rom. vi. 23. ‡ Gal. vi. 8.
§ James i. 15. ‖ Rom. vi. 21. ¶ Eph. v. 6
** Gal. vi. 7.

XI.

ON THE CAUSE, AGENT, AND PURPOSE OF REGENERATION.

JAMES i. 18.—*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

IN this chapter the apostle endeavours to fortify the minds of the professors of christianity, under the various trials and persecutions to which their religion exposed them, by assuring them of the happy fruits, in their spiritual improvement, they might expect to reap from them here, and the more abundant reward which awaited them hereafter. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."*

Lest any might be induced to relax in their vigilance, under an idea that the circumstances of their trial were too arduous, and that if they shrunk in the combat they might excuse themselves from the consideration of its being disproportioned to their strength, and that they were, therefore, in fact, tempted of God, he takes pains to repel this insinuation, and to show, that the success of any temptation whatever is solely to be imputed to the unbridled corruption of the human heart. It is, he tells us, "when a man is drawn away by his own heart's lust, and enticed," that he is, "tempted;"† this sinful corruption has its origin in his own heart only; nor is it in the smallest degree to be imputed to God, as though he impelled to it by a direct agency, or so ordered things, in the course of his providence, as to render it unavoidable. The sum of his doctrine on this head appears to be this, that all evil is from ourselves, and from the disordered state of our hearts, on which temptation operates; while, on the contrary, all moral and spiritual good is from God, and "cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turn-

* James i. 2, 3. † James i. 14.

ing."* The communications of grace are emphatically denominated "good and perfect gifts," by way of asserting their immeasurable superiority to the blessings which relate to the present life; and of these gifts St. James affirms, that every one of them "is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" Their origin is truly celestial: they are not capable of being communicated, like the good things of this life, by one human being to another; they are, strictly speaking, divine donations, which can only proceed from above. As a farther illustration of the proposition he had been laying down, he introduces the words of the text: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." These words instruct us in the cause, the instrument, and the end, of the renovation of christians.

I. The cause is "the will" of God;—God operating by a free and spontaneous agency. His grace imparted in regeneration must be acknowledged to be grace the most free and unmixed, the fruit of his sovereign will, in opposition to any necessity of nature to which it may be ascribed: for, though the nature of his agency cannot but be consonant to his character, though the fruit of his Spirit cannot but be most pure and holy, yet he was under no necessity to interpose at all. That the effect of his special operation on the hearts of the faithful should be sanctifying, is unavoidable; but his operating at all by his Spirit, in the restoration of a fallen creature, is to be ascribed solely to "his own good pleasure."†

It is of his own will, as opposed, not only to a necessity of nature in him, but to any claim of merit in the subject of this his gracious agency. No previous worthiness of ours, no attractive excellence in us, engaged his attention, or induced him to exert his power in our renovation: for whence could this arise in a creature so fallen and corrupt as to need so thorough a renovation? Or how, since "every good and perfect gift cometh from above," can it be supposed to subsist previous to, or apart

* James i. 17. † Phil. ii. 13.

from, his donation? In the context the apostle has been strongly insisting on it, that the beginning of all moral evil is to be ascribed to man; the beginning of all good to the Supreme Being; and it is in supporting this assertion he introduces the words of the text, "Of his own will begat he us."

No signs of virtuous and laudable conduct had ensued to procure the communication of divine grace, agreeable to what another apostle observes, in his epistle to Titus: "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost."*

The production and maintenance of religion is styled by the same writer, "the good pleasure of his will."†

II. The instrument of this renovation is "the word of truth." In infusing the principle of divine life into the soul, God is wont to employ the gospel as the instrument, styled, with the utmost propriety, "the word of truth:" not only on account of the infallible truth and certainty of all its declarations, but on account of its high dignity and excellence, as a revelation from God, it is "the truth;" to which whatever is contrary is imposture, and whatever is compared to it insignificant.‡

It falls not within the limits of this discourse to illustrate, at large, the manner in which the word of God produces a saving change: two circumstances may suffice to establish the fact. The first is, that where the light of the gospel is unknown no such beneficial alteration in the character is perceived, no features of a renewed and sanctified mind are to be traced. The second is, that among those who live under the light of the gospel, the reality of such a change is less or more to be perceived, in proportion to the degree in which the gospel is seriously attended to, and cordially received. Every person who is deeply influenced by religious considerations, and enabled to live a holy and

* Titus iii. 5. † 2 Thess. i. 11. ‡ Gal. iii. 1.

spiritual life, will acknowledge his deep obligations to the gospel; and that it is to its distinguishing discoveries he is, under God, indebted for the renovation he has experienced. "Being born again," saith St. Peter, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."*

III. We are directed to the consideration of the end proposed by this regenerating influence, "that we might be a kind of firstfruits of the creatures."

In the Jewish law, which was, in all its essential parts, a perpetual shadow of the gospel, the firstfruits of the earth were commanded to be dedicated in the temple, and presented by the priest as an offering to God: "The first of the fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God."† In the performance of this part of religious duty, an affecting form of words was prescribed, expressive of the humility and gratitude of the offerer.‡ When a vineyard was planted, the Israelites were forbidden to partake of the fruits for the first three years; during which it was to be looked upon as uncircumcised and impure: "And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the Lord withal."§

In allusion to this, the apostle observes, the design of

* 1 Pet. i. 23. † Exod. xxxiv. 26.

‡ "Thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the *Lord* thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the *Lord* thy God shall choose to place his name there.

"And thou shalt speak and say before the *Lord* thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty and populous.

"And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O *Lord*, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the *Lord* thy God, and worship before the *Lord* thy God." Deut. xxvi. 2, 5, 10.

§ Lev. xix. 23, 24.

christianity is, that being received into the heart as a renovating principle, we may become in a spiritual sense, what the fruits presented in the temple were in a literal; "a certain first-fruits of his creatures:" in which representation, he meant, probably, to include the following ideas:—that we should be dedicated to God as holy persons, separated from every unclean use; that we should be distinguished as the most excellent part of his creatures; as the firstfruits were ever considered as the best of the kind; and that our dedication to God should be a pledge and [earnest] of the universal sanctification of the creatures.

1. This representation denotes our solemn dedication to God, as holy persons,—as persons set apart for his use and service. Christians are not their own, and the method by which God claims and appropriates them to himself is that of regenerating grace.

The principle of regeneration is a principle which prompts men to devote themselves to God. They in whom it is planted "present themselves a living sacrifice;"* as "a reasonable service," they present all their faculties and powers to him; their understanding, to be guided and enlightened by his truth; their will, to be swayed by his authority, and to be obedient to his dictates; their hearts and affections, to be filled with his presence, and replenished with his love; the members of their body, to be instruments of his glory, sacred to his use; their time, to be employed in the way which he directs, and in pursuit of the objects which he prescribes, and no longer according to the dictates of inclination and caprice. They feel, and cheerfully acknowledge, the obligations they are under to regard him as their God,—their owner and their Lord, through the Redeemer. They deprecate the thought of considering themselves under any other light, than as those who are "bought with a price;"† that, as God was highly honoured by presenting the firstfruits in the temple, since it was an acknowledgement of the absolute

* Rom. xii. 1. † 1 Cor. vi. 20

right over all things inhering in him, and that whatever was possessed was held at his pleasure, so he is much more honoured by our devoting ourselves, in proportion as the offerer is superior to the gift, in proportion as a reasonable creature is superior to unconscious matter. "They gave themselves," says St. Paul, speaking of the Macedonians, "first to the Lord;"* they gave themselves immediately to Jesus Christ as the great High Priest and Mediator, to be by him presented with acceptance to the Father, just as the basket of firstfruits was put into the hand of the priests, to be laid upon that "altar which sanctifies the gift."† It would have been great presumption for an Israelite to present his fruits without the intervention of the priest, as they were to be received immediately from his hands; so, in our approaches, we are to come first to the Mediator, and, in his name, to devote ourselves to God: "No man cometh to the Father but by him."‡

Though we are infinitely unworthy of the acceptance of so great King, yet, when we present *ourselves*, we offer the noblest present in our power, we offer that which has an intrinsic excellence, far beyond the most costly material gifts; we offer what has a suitability in it to the character of God; that which is immaterial, to the "Father of lights,"§ and that which is spiritual, to the "Father of spirits."|| If he will deign to receive any tribute or acknowledgement at the hands of a fallen creature, as he has demonstrated his readiness to do through a Mediator; what can be deemed equally fit for this purpose with the solemn consecration of our inmost powers to him, in love, adoration, and obedience? A soul resigning itself to him, panting after him, and ambitious of pleasing him in all things, is a far more excellent gift than the numerous peace-offerings which Solomon, surrounded by a whole nation, presented at the dedication of the temple. Under the gospel he makes little account of other offering: the fruit which he

* 2 Cor. viii. 5. † Matt. xxiii. 19. ‡ John xiv. 6.
§ James i. 17. || Heb. xii. 9.

demands is the fruit of our lips. By the Lord Jesus, therefore, " let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."* When the fruits were dedicated, the grant was irrevocable. The right to them passed fully and for ever from the offerer, so as to make it impossible for him ever to resume them again. Thus, when we have dedicated ourselves to God, the act is irrevocable; we must never pretend the least right in ourselves any more; we are to consider ourselves entirely the Lord's.

2. This " being a certain firstfruits of his creatures," denotes the superior honour and dignity which it is the gracious design of God to put upon christians. The firstfruits presented to God were not only required to be of the best, but they derived a preeminence above all others, from the very circumstance of their being dedicated to God ; they were employed to a nobler use. Grace dignifies and exalts, in a similar manner, its possessor : " The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour ;" † however obscure in station, and however beclouded and depressed by the meanness of his external condition, he is one of the excellent of the earth. His employment is that of " a king and a priest unto God."‡ In reflecting some rays of his image, in advancing the honour, and sustaining the cause of the blessed God, he is infinitely more honourably occupied than the votaries of the world, or the servants of sin. His calling is "high and heavenly."§ He is associated with Jesus and the holy angels in sacred ministries, his pursuits are of a permanent and eternal nature.

If we consider the principles, also, which actuate good men and form the basis of their character, we shall perceive a greatness and elevation to which the world is an entire stranger. Is there nothing more noble in taking a wide prospect, and in looking at " the things which are unseen and eternal,"|| than in being absorbed in tran-

* Heb. xiii. 15.
† Prov. xii. 26.
‡ Rev. i. 6.
§ Heb. iii. 1
|| 2 Cor. iv. 18.

sitory concerns? Is not that a higher species of wisdom which calculates upon the interests and advantages which lie concealed from eyes of flesh in the depths of eternity, than that which contents itself with securing perishing riches?

Is it not incomparably more noble and more worthy of an immortal creature to be "providing for himself bags that wax not old," "a treasure in the heavens that fadeth not,"* than in searching for "filthy lucre?" † Is there not more true dignity in the patience that waits with composure to be happy, than in the childish eagerness which catches at every momentary gratification? Is it not more magnanimous to conquer than submit to the world? to tread the world under our feet than to be enslaved by it? to be able to exercise that self-command over our sensual affections which secures the pleasures of innocence and the approbation of conscience, than to be the victim of unbridled passions? to rule our own spirit, than to be the sport of its tyrannical disorder? to rise above a sense of injury so as to forgive our enemies, rather than to be tormented with malice and revenge? He must be insensible to reason, who is at a loss how to answer these interrogatories; and to answer them in the affirmative is to attest the superior dignity of the christian character, to acknowledge that christians are "a sort of firstfruits of the creatures."

They are so at present, with all the imperfections which attach to their state and their character; but they will be incomparably more so, when they shall be assembled around the throne, and it shall be declared of them;—"These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth: these were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb." ‡

3. The representation of christians as a certain firstfruits of the creatures, implies the accession of the future harvest: they are a pledge only of what is to follow: their dedication to God as the firstfruits is a preparation

* Luke xii. 33. † 1 Tim. iii. 3. ‡ Rev. xiv. 4.

for the universal prevalence of religion,—the universal sanctification of the creatures.

Improvement.

I. Let us adore God for having planted in the breast a principle of true religion.

II. Let us be ambitious of exemplifying the excellence and dignity of our christian calling.

III. As an important means of this, let us study the gospel, and endeavour to gain a deeper and more extensive acquaintance with the word of truth.*

XII.

ON SPIRITUAL DEATH.

Eph. ii. 1.—*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*

The power of God was most illustriously displayed in raising Christ from the dead; but there is another operation of divine power which bears a great resemblance to this, of which every individual believer is the subject. It is the prayer of the apostle, in the latter part of the preceding chapter, that the Ephesians might have an increasing experience of the effects of that power which is exerted towards "them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power:" and what particular effect of divine [power] he had in immediate contemplation, he informs us in the first part of the ensuing chapter: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." He had not merely raised Christ from the dead, but he had wrought a similar deliverance for the Ephesians, by imparting spiritual life to those who had been dead in trespasses and sins.

In treating of these words, I shall first inquire to what extent this representation of a death in trespasses and

* Preached 7th of March, 1811, at the Wednesday evening lecture.

sins is to be applied, and to what description of persons it belongs. Secondly, I shall endeavour to show its import:—and, thirdly, make a few remarks on the wretched state of those who may justly be affirmed to be dead in trespasses and sins.

May the Lord the Spirit apply the awful truths we shall have occasion to unfold, with power to the conscience!

I. Are those expressions, "dead in trespasses and sins," to be understood as applicable only, or chiefly to heathens? or to such in christian countries as have run very remarkable lengths in wickedness? or are they applicable to the state of the unconverted universally? The heathen, say some, were exceedingly corrupt and wicked, totally enslaved by idols, "without hope, and without God in the world." It was in consideration of this their remarkable alienation from God, and extreme corruption of manners, the apostle was led to employ such phrases; which are by no means to be applied to men educated in the light of christianity, although they may not yet be in a state of salvation. Whether the representation applies to heathens only, or to those in a christian country, who for their enormous sins may be justly compared to heathens; or whether they are to be applied to unconverted sinners universally, will perhaps sufficiently appear from the following considerations.

1. The apostle expressly includes himself among those whose former state he had been considering.* To the same purpose the apostle includes himself in the following description. "For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another."†

2. The same expression is applied generally to those who never were heathens. "And another of his disciples said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said, Let the dead bury their dead,"‡ the meaning of which is obvious. Let those who are spirit-

* Eph. ii. 3, 4. † Tit. iii. 3. ‡ Matt. viii. 22.

ually dead, who are therefore totally unqualified to serve me in the gospel, perform such offices as those, to which they are fully equal; but for thee, thou art fitted for a higher and nobler employment—go thou and preach the gospel.

3. It is the declared intention of Jesus Christ, by his appearance in our world, to give life to the world by exhibiting himself as the bread of life. "I am come that they might have life."* Here we have the affirmation of him that cannot lie; that those, whosoever they be that are destitute of saving faith, are also destitute of spiritual life. "They have no life in them;" † which can surely be understood in no other sense than what is equivalent to the passage before us.

4. True christians, without any exception, are described as persons who have "passed from death unto life."‡ "He that heareth my words, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but hath passed from death unto life."§ "Hereby we know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren; he that loveth not his brother abideth in death."||

Here the moral state of the world is supposed to be separated by an invisible boundary into two regions, a region of life and a region of death; and it is implied, that none come into the former, that is, that of life, but by passing into it from the latter. They were not natives of this blessed region, but migrated or travelled to it from an opposite one. And who are those remaining in a state of death? "He who loveth not his brother," that is, who loveth not christians as christians, which is certainly the character of all the unrenewed and unregenerate. We are justified, then, in applying this description—"dead in trespasses and sins," to every person who has not been renewed by the grace of God.

It is time to proceed, in the next place, to explain the import of this representation, or to unfold some of the leading particulars included in a state of spiritual death.

* John x. 10; vi. 32, 33. † John vi. 53.
‡ John v. 24. § Ibid. || 1 John iii. 14.

1. It implies a privation, or withdrawment, of a principle, which properly belongs, and once did belong, to the subject of which it is affirmed. It would be quite improper to speak of any thing as dead which was never endued with a living principle. We never speak of the inanimate parts of creation, such as earth and stones, as dead, because they are as they ever were; no living powers are extinguished in them. But from whatever once had life, when that life is withdrawn which it formerly possessed, we affirm that it is dead. Thus we speak of plants, of animals and men, when bereft of the vital principle, as dead. The death that overspreads the souls of the unregenerate consists in privations, in the withdrawment of what originally belonged to the soul of man, that gracious communication from God which is life. As the life of the body is derived from its union with the immortal spirit, and continues no longer than while that union subsists, so the life of the soul is derived from its union with God. Sin dissolved that union. In consequence of sin the blessed [God] withdrew from the soul, and the effect of that is, that though it is not deprived of its natural powers, as the body, even after death, still continues to subsist as matter; its life and happiness are gone.

The withdrawment of God is, with respect to the soul, what the withdrawment of the soul is in relation to the body. In each case the necessary effect is death; and as that which occasioned that withdrawment is sin, it is very properly denominated a " death in trespasses and sins." Now this view of the subject ought surely to fill us with the deepest concern. Had man never possessed a principle of divine life, there would have been less to lament in his condition. We are less affected at the consideration of what we never had, than by the loss of advantages which we once possessed. We look at a stone, or a piece of earth, without the least emotion, because, though it be destitute of life, we are conscious it was never possessed. But, when we look upon a corpse, it excites an awful feeling. Here, we are ready to reflect [and] say, dwelt an immortal spirit; those eyes were

once kindled, those limbs were once animated by an ethereal fire, and a soul was once diffused throughout this frame. It is now fled, and has left nothing but the ruins of a man. Did we view things in a right light, we should be far more affected still in contemplating a dead soul. Here we should remember, God once dwelt. The soul of man was once the abode of light and life. "How is the gold changed, and the fine gold become dim!" It is now overspread with carnality and darkness. It is now a lost, fallen spirit.

2. To be dead in trespasses and sins, intimates the total, the universal prevalence of corruption.

Life admits of innumerable degrees and kinds. There is one sort of vegetative life, as in plants, another subsists in animals, and in man a rational, which is still a superior principle of life. Where life is of the same sort it is susceptible of different degrees. It is much more perfect in the larger sorts of animals than in reptiles. The vital principle in different men exists with various degrees of vigour, so that some are far more animated, alert, and vigorous than others. But there are no degrees in death. All things, of which it can be truly said that they are dead, are equally dead. There are no degrees in privation; thus it is with all who are dead in trespasses and sins. They are all equally dead. They may possess very estimable and amiable qualities, such as naturally engage the love of their fellow-creatures; but, being equally destitute of a principle of spiritual life, they are all in one and the same state of death; they are governed by the same carnal principle; they are in the flesh, and therefore cannot please God.* They are alike subjects of the prince of darkness; they serve the same master, and belong to the same kingdom. Every unsanctified person is totally "alienated from the life of God,"—is totally devoid of love to Him, and a perception of his true glory and excellence. How can it be otherwise, when he is under the influence of that "carnal mind which is enmity against God?" † There are some

* Rom. viii. 8

† Rom. viii. 7.

sinners who are of so winning and gentle a disposition, that we are ready to flatter ourselves it is easy to conduct them to God, and to form them to the love and practice of true religion; but, when the experiment is tried, we soon find ourselves undeceived. Unless the Spirit of God pleases to operate, we find it as impossible to persuade them to seek the Lord by prayer, to mortify their corruptions, and set their affections on heavenly things, as persons of the most forbidding and unamiable tempers. We discover a rooted and invincible antipathy to whatever is spiritual. There are others who, by the influences of

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XIII.

ON CONVERSION, AS ILLUSTRATED BY THAT OF ST. PAUL.

Gal. i. 15, 16.—*But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*

Of all the events which can befall us in this transitory state, there is none which deserves equally to be devoutly reflected upon with our conversion to God. This is an event by far the most important and the most beneficial. In looking back upon it, the strongest motives arise to humility, to gratitude, and to "a patient continuance in well doing." We find the holy apostle frequently adverting to it; always in terms that bespeak the lively impression the review of it made on his mind. In the case of St. Paul, there were many circumstances not paralleled in the general experience of christians; but in its essential features, in the views with which it was accompanied, and the effects it produced, it was exactly the same as every one must experience before he can enter into the kingdom of God.

As things of an internal and spiritual nature are best understood by examples, so we shall be at a loss, in the whole records of the church, to find a more striking and instructive example of the efficacy of divine grace in conversion, than that of St. Paul, to which he directs the attention of the Galatians, in the passage under present consideration. In this instructive passage he gives us a view of his conversion, in its causes, its means, and its effects.

I. Its causes. "He separated me from my mother's womb." Thus he styles [himself] "separated to the Gospel of God."* It is possible he may allude to the revelation to Jeremiah on his appointment to the prophetic office: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and ordained thee to be a prophet to the nations."†

While he, Paul, was running a career of persecuting fury, the Saviour entertained designs of mercy towards him, agreeable to what he declared to Ananias:—"he is a chosen vessel to me to confess my name before nations, and kings, and the people of Israel."‡

We cannot suppose the purposes of God to be of recent date, or to have taken rise from any limited point of time. What he designs, he designs from eternity. Whatever he accomplishes is agreeable to his eternal purposes and word: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purposes and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began"§ Did he separate the apostle from his mother's womb? was he a chosen vessel? and must we not affirm [the same] of every one who is made partaker of the grace that is in Jesus Christ? Are not all genuine christians addressed as "elect of God," or chosen of God, "through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ?"|| Why should

* Rom. i. 1. † Jer. i. 5. ‡ Acts ix. 15.
§ 2 Tim. i. 9. || 1 Pet. i. 2.

not the real christian give scope to those emotions of gratitude which such reflections will inspire? Why should he not adore that mercy which preserved him in his unregenerate state, spared him while in his sins and waited to be gracious?

The next cause, the more immediate one, to which the apostle ascribes his conversion, was his call by divine grace.

"Whom he predestinated, them he also called."* There is a general call in the gospel, addressed to all men indiscriminately. Gracious invitations are given, without exception, far as the sound of the gospel extends; but this, of itself, is not effectual. There is, in every instance of real conversion, another and inward call, by which the Spirit applies the general truth of the gospel to the heart.

By this interior call Christ apprehends, lays hold on the soul, stops it in its impenitent progress, and causes it to "hear his voice."

The methods of the divine operations in this inward and effectual calling are very various. Sometimes alarming and awakening providences are made use of for this purpose. The solemnities of death and judgement are forcibly presented to the attention: judgement appears nearly to commence, and the awful scenes of eternity appear near; the careless creature is awakened to perceive his guilt and danger, and is compelled to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?"—as when the earthquake, and the opening of the prison-doors, accompanied with unspeakable terrors, impressed the obdurate mind of the jailor, and made him fall down at the feet of his prisoners, trembling and amazed. Of the three thousand, at the day of Pentecost, we read, that "they were pricked in their heart." Others, like the eunuch, and Lydia, are wrought upon in a more gentle manner—drawn with the "cords of love, and the ties of man."

That there is such a change produced by the Spirit of God, will not be questioned by a diligent and attentive

* Rom. viii. 30.

peruser of the Scriptures: he will observe, the Spirit is always affirmed to be the author of a saving change; and the regenerate are particularly affirmed to be "born of God,"* "born of the Spirit."† In applying the term called, to such persons in a peculiar sense, we have the clearest authority of the Scriptures: "To them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."‡ "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called,"§ &c. This calling is by grace; "Who hath called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace."||

II. The *means* by which conversion is effected: "Revealing his Son in me." The principal method which the Spirit adopts in subduing the heart of a sinner, is, a spiritual discovery of Christ.

There is an attractive force in the Saviour, when beheld by faith, which commands. Christ crucified possesses a drawing power: "When the Son of man is lifted up, he will draw all men unto him."¶ No radical and saving change is effected, without the exhibition of this object; nor are the terrors of the law alone ever sufficient for that purpose; they are sufficient to show the heinousness of sin, and the extreme danger to which the sinner is exposed, but have no tendency to produce a complete renovation. "By the law is the knowledge of sin:"** the law will discover our disease, but the knowledge of Christ is the discovery of the remedy. The law denounces its awful sentence: the discovery of Christ points out the method of deliverance and escape. The law at most is but a pedagogue, or "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." All saving influence and solid consolation springs from him, and from him alone. "The law kills," as the ministration of condemnation; it is "Christ who makes alive."

* 1 John iv. 7. † John iii. 5. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 24. § Rom. viii. 28–30. || 2 Tim. i. 9. ¶ John xii. 32. ** Rom. iii. 20.

The revelation of Christ is found in the Scriptures; but in conversion the Spirit removes "the veil on the heart," dispels prejudice, and affords that inward and divine light by which alone Christ is discerned to saving purposes. St. Paul speaks of Christ being revealed in him, in distinction from that external record of him which is contained in the word.

As there is an external call and an internal; the former universal, but often ineffectual; the latter personal, but always efficient; so there is an outward revelation of Christ and an internal, of which the understanding and the heart are the seat. Hence it is, with the utmost propriety, said to be a revelation "IN US." The minds of men, until they are renewed, resemble an apartment, shut up and enclosed with something which is not transparent; the light shines around with much splendour, but the apartment remains dark, in consequence of its entrance being obstructed. Unbelief, inattention, love of the world and of sin, and hardness of heart, form the obstructions in question. Let these be removed, and the discoveries of the word penetrate and diffuse a light and conviction through the soul: "The light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."* Thus it was with St. Paul before his conversion: his prejudices against the gospel were inveterate; his animosity violent and active; but no sooner was Christ revealed in him, than all was changed. The Spirit of God reveals the following things in Christ:—

1. His greatness and dignity. Men in their unrenewed state have very low and contemptible thoughts of Christ. Whatever complimentary epithets they may bestow upon him, they have in their hearts no [elevated] conception of him, but just the contrary: he is to them "a root out of a dry ground." St. Paul had the most mean thoughts of Christ previous to his conversion; but after that these mistaken views were entirely corrected. The majesty and power of Christ were exhibited to him with such effect, that he fell at his feet, exclaiming, "What

* John i. 5.

wilt thou have me to do?"* He was from that moment fully convinced that Jesus Christ had "all power in heaven and in earth," that he was seated at the right hand of God, and that he was in all respects that great and glorious person which the Scriptures represent him to be. His views were extended and enlarged; an interest in him appeared supremely valuable, his approbation supremely desirable. The knowledge of him appeared to be the most excellent knowledge.

2. The Spirit reveals his transcendent beauty and glory. The Scriptures speak much of the transcendent excellency of Christ, the perception of which has laid a foundation for that ardent attachment which the faithful have borne to him in every age. There is a surpassing beauty in the Saviour, which needs but to be perceived in order to eclipse every [other] object, and make it appear insipid and contemptible in the comparison. This beauty is visible in every part of the Saviour's character. In whatever light he is viewed, he is "fairer than the sons of men." "Grace is poured into his lips." "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, wherein they have made thee glad."† "Because of the savour of thy good ointments; thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee."

It is of him that Isaiah speaks, when he foretells the high esteem in which he should be held in a future age; "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely to them that are escaped of Israel."‡

3. The Spirit reveals the suitableness, fulness, and sufficiency of the Saviour, to supply all our wants and relieve all our miseries. The fitness of his offices [as Redeemer and Mediator] to our situation, and his complete competence to discharge these offices; the richness and perfection of that provision which there is in Christ is a principal part of what the Spirit reveals in conversion. In consequence, the soul is emboldened to venture

* Acts ix. 6. † Ps. xlv. 8. ‡ Isa. iv 2.

upon him, and, extinguishing all other hope and confidence to rely upon him alone. This is that reception of Christ which, whosoever gives, is entitled to the privilege of becoming the child of God.

III. We proceed to remark the effect of St. Paul's conversion. Immediately, "I conferred not with flesh and blood." He was not, "disobedient to the heavenly vision." He set himself, without hesitation or demur, to discharge the duties of his heavenly vocation.

1. His compliance with the will of Christ was instant, *immediate*, not like the eldest son in the parable, whom the father commanded to work in his vineyard.*

2. It was universal and impartial. He did not make choice and selection of the more easy duties and less costly sacrifices, but engaged in the service thoroughly and conscientiously. He spent his life in a series of most laborious, painful, and self-denying service, not living to himself. He spent his life in publishing the name of the Saviour who had been revealed in him.

3. His compliance was constant and persevering.

XIV.

ON THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

Acts xxvi. 9—18.—*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priests, at mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But*

* Matt. xxi. 28, 29.

rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

The conversion of St. Paul is one of the most extraordinary facts recorded in the sacred Scriptures; and, whether we consider it as affording a demonstration of the truth of christianity, or as illustrating the power of divine grace, it is deserving of most deep meditation.

So sudden a transformation of character as this narrative presents, must surely be acknowledged to deserve a thorough investigation by all who conceive the principles of human conduct a proper object of attention and inquiry. It is surely natural to look into the cause of such a change, as well as to consider the effects which it produced, and the issue to which it tended.

Every christian is so well acquainted with the sufferings and labours of this chief of the apostles, and has contracted so sacred a friendship with the name of Paul, that the circumstances which led to so great a revolution in his character, cannot fail to be interesting.

Let us, then, in dependence on divine assistance, take a review of the most striking particulars of this transaction, and endeavour to raise such reflections as the subject may naturally suggest.

I. Let us consider his previous character and conduct, and the actual state of his mind immediately before the change took place.

1. Of the incidents of his early life, we are not furnished with very full and distinct information. We learn that he was a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, a city famous for its schools of philosophy, as well as for having given birth to some of the most eminent philosophers. His extraction, both on the side of his father and mother, was purely Jewish; but, owing to some benefit conferred on his ancestors, he was entitled by his

birth to the privileges of a Roman citizen. His education was learned; for he was born at Tarsus, and spent his first years there. He came at an early period to Jerusalem, and was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrim, and a celebrated doctor of the law. This was that Gamaliel who, by his temperate and judicious advice, restrained the violence of the Jewish council, who were determined to put Peter and John to death. His young disciple, Saul, seems to have imbibed nothing of his moderation, but to have been uniformly instigated by a most implacable fury against the christian cause. From his earliest youth he was of the "strictest sect of the Pharisees," who were not satisfied with complying with every punctilio of the Mosaic law, but adopted a multitude of traditions and ceremonies, of human invention, which they placed on the same footing, and deemed equally certain.

In common with the greater part of his countrymen, he held the perpetual and eternal obligation of the Mosaic law, and depended on his legal performances entirely for salvation. Though the sacrifices ordained under the law pointed to the atonement of Jesus Christ, he overlooked this reference; and, full of a confidence in his own rectitude, abhorred and disdained the idea of being indebted for salvation to a crucified Messiah. The poverty and meanness of Christ was an offence to his proud and haughty spirit; and the cross, which he endured for the expiation of sin, was a stumbling-block. He believed, no doubt, in a Messiah; but the person he expected under that character was a great and victorious prince, invested with secular pomp and glory; who was to break asunder the Roman yoke, and raise the Jews to the pinnacle of human greatness: and therefore, when he observed that Jesus was so far from accomplishing these hopes that he died the death of the meanest malefactor, he regarded him as a mean and detestable impostor. When he heard the apostles testify his resurrection, assure him that he was exalted at the right hand of God, and that salvation and the remission of sins were to be sought solely through his blood, his pre-

judices rose to the utmost violence; and he resented a doctrine which he considered as offering an insult to the whole Jewish nation. As he was taught to look upon the Jews as the distinguished favourites of the Most High, while he considered the Gentiles as reprobate and accursed; he abhorred the thought of that new doctrine which threatened to break down the "wall of partition," and to admit Gentiles and Jews to participate in the same privileges. He knew that the apostles were wont to denounce the judgements of God on the Jewish nation, for their rejection of Christ; and though they would naturally maintain a prudent reserve on the subject of their approaching calamities as a nation, they must have been well aware, from several of our Lord's parables, and particularly from his last prophecy, that the time was approaching when the temple at Jerusalem would be destroyed, its services abolished, the holy city trodden under foot, and the Jewish people be carried captive into all nations. It was some intimation of this kind, in the discourses of Stephen, which gave birth to the accusation—"We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God." They set up false witnesses, which said, "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." Under these impressions, Saul looked upon the christian sect as directly opposed to the dignity and perpetuity of the temple, the Mosaic law, and all the ceremonies and privileges by which the descendants of Abraham were distinguished from pagan nations.

All the prejudices of education, all the pride of a Jew, and the self-righteousness of a Pharisee, conspired with the violence of youth, and eager ambition to acquire the esteem of his superiors, and hurried him to the utmost excesses in opposing the cause of Christ. He seems to have devoted his life to one object,—the utter extirpation, if possible, of the christian name. When

Stephen was stoned, he was consenting to, or rather felt a pleasure in, his death; and so zealous did he appear on this occasion, that the witnesses laid down their clothes at his feet while they engaged in this work of blood. The death of Stephen was the signal of a general persecution, in which Saul appears to have taken a very active part: "As for Saul, he made great havoc of the church," saith St. Luke, "entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison."* Having received a commission from the high priest, he went on the same errand to Damascus; that if he found there any "of the same way" he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. During his journey he was revolving with delight the confusion and misery he should produce among the defenceless followers of Christ; and when he drew near enough to Damascus to take a view of the city, he no doubt exulted at the idea of being so near his prey. He feasted in the prospect of scattering the sheep of Christ, of dissolving their assemblies, and inflicting upon them the severest sufferings his malice could devise: "he breathed out threatenings and slaughter."† Little did he think of the change he was about to undergo;—little did he [anticipate] that astonishing scene of things which was about to be laid open to his view. He had hitherto confined his persecutions to Jerusalem and its immediate environs: he had now procured a more enlarged commission, which extended to a remote city. Damascus was nearly two hundred miles distant from Jerusalem. [It was in Syria; and was at that time under the dominion of Aretas, king of Arabia Petræa, a prince tributary to the Roman empire: under him was a governor who] permitted the interference of the Sanhedrim with the synagogues, [and greatly favoured those that persecuted the disciples of Christ.‡]

* Acts viii. 3. † Acts ix. 1.

‡ See 2 Cor. xi. 32; and Joseph. de Bell. Jud. lib. ii. cap. 25. The Romans, says Grotius, allowed the Jews the privilege of "apprehending and beating" not only with regard to the Jews of Palestine, but also out of Palestine, wherever there were synagogues that acknowledged the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrim in matters of religion.—Ed.

We cannot conceive a state of mind more unfavourable to Christianity, or less likely to issue in a cordial subjection to Christ, than that of which Saul was possessed at that moment. During a long journey, no misgivings of mind, no emotions of pity towards the innonocent objects of his resentment, nor the smallest hesitation respecting the propriety and rectitude of his proceedings, appear to have been felt.

Notwithstanding this, he was suddenly stopped in his career, and effectually diverted from his purposes. The means by which this was accomplished, the inspired historian distinctly relates. He was a "chosen vessel,"* and he was "separated, from his mother's womb."† The moment was arrived in which the gracious designs of God were to unfold themselves. But with what awful majesty is God pleased to attemper the dispensations of his grace towards guilty men! When he is pleased to show mercy, it is in a manner worthy of himself, in a manner most adapted to stain the pride of man, and to cause "that no flesh should glory in his presence." If the God, with whom we have to do, appears great and awful in the revelation of his mercy, what will he be in the execution of his justice in the finally impenitent? Hitherto we have witnessed the dominance of pride, bigotry, and passion, suffered to operate without control; we are now to contemplate the interposition of divine grace in abasing that pride, dispelling that prejudice, allaying the tumult of that passion. We shall see, in the instance before us, what methods the Lord Jesus adopted, more fully to apprehend the fugitive and the rebel; to soften his heart, and to make him become a willing captive at his feet: "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."‡

* Acts ix. 15. † Gal. i. 15. ‡ Acts ix. 3—5.

In his speech before Agrippa, St. Paul relates the circumstance of the light shining round him, in the following manner: "At mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them that journeyed with me." This light was not indebted to a surrounding obscurity for any part of its lustre: on the contrary, it shone forth at mid-day with a splendour that eclipsed the beams of a meridian sun. It was the light of [divine] glory which Saul beheld on this occasion; that light unapproachable, in which Jesus Christ continually dwells. It was of the same nature as that which St. John describes in his vision, when he says, "His countenance was as the sun shining in his strength." It was that light in which he will appear when he comes to judge the world, "and every eye shall see him."

Much as the prophets and apostles have said of the glory of Christ, it is impossible for us to form an adequate conception of it: the full revelation of it is reserved for a future state, when, if we are true christians, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."*

How short is the transition between this and the unseen world! How soon, when God pleases, can he transport his creatures into higher scenes of existence! It is but for him to draw aside the veil, and objects are presented to the view, compared to which, whatever is most admired on earth is mean and contemptible. Every moment we stand upon the confines of an eternal state, and, without dissolving the connexion between soul and body, God can open a passage into the "heaven of heavens." Why should we doubt of good men's being admitted into the more immediate presence of Christ at death, when we consider what Saul was permitted to see and hear before he was finally removed from this world? St. Stephen beheld the heavens open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God; and Saul, in the transaction before us, was permitted to see that Just One, and to hear the words of his mouth. Along with

* 1 John iii. 2.

the light a voice was heard, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

This solemn question is replete with instruction. He does not condescend to reason with Saul; he enters into no vindication of his cause: with the dignity suited to his character, he expostulates and warns

It deserves our attention, that he identifies himself with his disciples; he makes their cause entirely his own and considers what is done against them as against himself: "Why persecutest thou me?" Christ and believers, notwithstanding the immense disparity of their circumstances, are one. He is touched with a feeling of their sufferings; and, whatever insults or reproaches are offered to them for his name's sake, he feels and resents as done to himself. Let those who are tempted to insult and despise the followers of Christ, on account of their conscientious adherence to him, remember that their scoffs and insults reach higher than they may apprehend; they will be considered as falling on their Sovereign and their Judge.

Personal injuries it is impossible now to offer to the Saviour; but the state of our hearts towards him will be judged by our treatment of his followers: and he has warned us, that it were better a "millstone were hanged round our neck, and we buried in the depths of the sea, than that we should injure one of these little ones who believe on him."*

In answer to the inquiry, "Who art thou, Lord?" he replies, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." You will observe, he does not style himself here, the Christ, or the Son of God—"I am Jesus of Nazareth."† Jesus was the proper name of our Lord, a common appellation among the Jews; and the addition of *Nazareth* had usually been made as expressive of contempt. on contempt, He was usually styled "the Nazarene." Our Lord was determined to confound Paul by the meanest of his appellations; and resolved to efface the

* Matt. xviii. 6. † Acts xxii. 8.

ignominy attached to this appellation, and to cause himself to be adored by Saul under the very names by which he had been most vilified and contemned. "It is hard," he adds, "for thee to kick against the pricks." He compares Paul to the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, who, in order to free himself, wounds himself by kicking against the goads. Thus fruitless is all opposition to the cause of Christ. It will be injurious, it will be destructive to ourselves, if not desisted from; but can never eventually injure the cause against which it is directed. The heathen may rage, and yet "the Lord hath set his King upon his holy hill of Zion,"* and there he will for ever continue to sit.

To all who oppose him, he will prove a burdensome stone, "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence."† "Whosoever shall fall upon it shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."‡

To those who judge by the eyes of flesh, persecuting the servants of Christ may possibly appear a very easy task; but to those that remember who is engaged to be their Protector, it will appear in a very different light—it will appear the most dangerous employment in which they can be engaged.

The time will come, my brethren, when we shall perceive we might as safely have insulted the prince upon his throne, as persecuted Christ in the person of the meanest of his members.

"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." How many Pontius Pilates and Herods, in different ages, has this crime doomed to destruction! We may trace the effects of it in the astonishing scenes that are now passing in the world. We may behold it in the subversion of thrones, and the misery and desolation of kingdoms. For, though the immediate instrument employed in inflicting these calamities is the insatiable ambition of an individual, they must in general be traced to higher sources—the unrepented crime of persecution. Who, that reads the prophecies, but sees that it is the weight

* Ps. ii. 6. † Isaiah viii. 14. ‡ Luke xx. 18.

of christian blood—the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, that now presses and weighs down the nations on the Continent, and makes them reel and stagger like a drunken man "They have shed the blood of saints and of prophets; and the Lord has given them blood to drink; for they are worthy."*

Let us guard against whatever approaches to this crime. If you will not walk in the ways of religion yourself—if you will not take the yoke of Christ upon you, at least be careful to abstain from vilifying and reproaching his servants. Respect the piety you are not disposed to imitate.

"What wilt thou have me to do?" He makes no stipulation; his surrender of himself is absolute; the words he utters are expressive of absolute submission. Such a surrender of ourselves into the hands of Christ, such a submission from us [also] is absolutely necessary.

He is directed what to do; and he complies punctually with the direction. "He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."† For a further account of our Saviour's address, see Acts xxvi. 16—18.

He was blinded by the light. (Acts xxii. 11.)

He gave himself up to solitude and prayer.

He would doubtless reflect on the following things:—

1. On what he had seen.
2. On what he had done.
3. On what lay before him.

XV.

THE LAMB SLAIN, THE OBJECT OF RAPTURE TO THE HEAVENLY HOSTS.

Rev. v. 6.—*And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain.*

In the preceding chapter John is presented with a magnificent vision: a door is opened in heaven, through

* Rev. xvi. 6. † Acts xxvi. 19.

which he passes, and beholds the throne of God, and the Almighty sitting upon it. The several orders of creatures which make their appearance there, celebrate a solemn act of worship to him "which was, and which is, and which is to come, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created."*

As the holy apostle was now on the point of being instructed in those mysteries of providence, whose accomplishment was to reach from the time of this vision to the consummation of all things, involving the remotest destinies of the church and of the world, so the manner in which it is imparted is such as must give us the highest idea of its importance. It formed the contents of a roll of a book, in the hand of him that sat on the throne, "written within and on the backside and sealed with seven seals."† The whole universe is challenged to furnish one who is capable of loosing these seals and exploring its contents. ' And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the sea s thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon."‡

The apostle, whose mind was inflamed with solicitude to be made acquainted with these mysteries, wept much at finding there was none worthy to loose the seals and to open the book. And one of the lders said unto him, "Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof."

Under this emblem, Jesus Christ is represented; alluding to the prophetic benediction of the patriarch Jacob—"Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped dow, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre," he adds, "shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come."§

* Rev. iv. 8, 10. 11. † Rev. v. 1. ‡ Rev. v. 2, 3. § Gen. xlix. 9, 10.

Judah was the regal tribe, and famous for its warlike exploits; distinguished by a succession of illustrious princes and conquerors, the descendants of David, who were at most but the forerunners and representatives of an incomparably greater personage, the Son of God; who, after he had vanquished the powers of darkness, was to be invested with an everlasting dominion, that all nations, tongues, and people should serve him.

While John was expecting to see some majestic appearance, he beheld, and, lo, a Lamb, with the marks of recent slaughter, presented himself before the throne, and he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat on it: upon which, the several orders of creatures "fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."*

Emblems of weakness, of innocence, and of suffering, made part in a scene where [we might] suppose nothing to enter but unmingled grandeur. Nor are the sufferings of Jesus Christ in our nature merely indistinctly introduced; they are the principal objects presented to the view: they are made the basis of that wonderful act of adoration, in which every creature in the universe unites. The portion of scripture which I have selected for our present improvement, thus introduced, suggests the two following important observations.

I. That the distinguishing merit of Christ arises from his having redeemed us to God by his blood.

II. That this part of his character engages the attention and the adoration of the heavenly world.

I. That which distinguishes the character of Christ from all other beings, is his condescension for the salvation of men.

* Rev. v. 8—10.

1. The Scriptures uniformly teach us to look upon the death of Christ in a light totally distinct from that of any other person. Considered in itself, it is not at all extraordinary; for in every age we find examples of those who have sealed the divine truth with their blood. We learn from the New Testament that such was the end of Stephen, of James, of Paul, and of Peter. It is one of those trials which Jesus warned his disciples to expect; insomuch, that to be prepared at his call to surrender their lives was an inseparable condition of becoming his followers. But to none of their sufferings were such purposes assigned, such effects ascribed, as are uniformly ascribed to the sufferings of the Saviour.

"Precious," indeed, "in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints;" but it is never represented as having the remotest connexion with the remission of sins. They are never represented as set forth for a propitiation. Where is the death of Peter, or of Paul, spoken of in such language as this?—"He who knew no sin was made sin for us; that we might become the righteousness of God through him:"*—"He laid on him the iniquity of us all: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed;"† "He was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification:"‡—not to mention innumerable other passages, equally clear and decisive? What language, that bears the least resemblance to this, is applied to any other subject? The great apostle speaks of Christ's dying behaviour as a part of his character which was altogether inimitable: "Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"§

2. Accordingly, the inspired writers never mention the death of Christ without emotions of devout rapture. The prayer of Paul for his christian converts was, that they might "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."|| It is the grand argument which they employ, to enforce the obligation of christians to love each

* 2 Cor. v. 21. † Isaiah liii. 5. 6. ‡ Rom. iv. 25.
§ 1 Cor. i. 13. || Ephes. iii. 19.

other, "even as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour."* "Herein is love," John exclaims "not that we loved him, but that he loved us, and gave himself for us."† This love was the motive which, with a sweet but irresistible violence, impelled them to devote themselves entirely to his service. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if Christ died for all, then were all dead; and he died, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him who died for them."‡ As the morality of the gospel is distinguished from that of the world, by being founded in love; so the devout contemplation of the love of Christ is the grand principle which kindles and inflames it

3. When the great Ruler of the world was pleased to accomplish his secret purpose of reconciling the sinful race of man to himself, by the pardon of their sins and the renewal of their natures, he saw fit to appoint his Son to be their surety, to assume their nature, and to die in their stead; "Great is the mystery of godliness; God manifest in the flesh."§ Instead of endeavouring to explore all the secret reasons of this wonderful economy, it rather becomes us thankfully to accept, and devoutly to adore it. It is sufficient for us to perceive, that no method within our comprehension could have equally provided for the display, at once, of his justice and of his mercy; his spotless purity, and his infinite compassion. In making his Son the sacrifice, justice appears in its utmost splendour; while, in freely "giving him up for us all," mercy appears in its most attractive form.

The highest lessons of purity and holiness are learned at the foot of the cross; and if we are desirous of discovering an effectual antidote to the love of sin, it must be the serious and steady contemplation by faith, of Christ crucified.

4. Salvation through the blood of the Redeemer,

* Ephes. v. 2. † 1 John iv. 10. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. § 1 Tim. iii. 16.

though it forms the distinguishing feature of the Christian system, was not peculiar to it. It entered into every dispensation of religion communicated by God. A multitude of types and figures were employed, to shadow forth the great expiatory sacrifice, previous to his manifestation in the flesh. He was the Paschal Lamb whose "blood sprinkled on the posts and lintels of the doors,"* secured the families of Israel from the destroying angel, in the night when God slew the first-born of Egypt: "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."† He was prefigured by all those burnt-offerings which were daily offered in the temple, and especially on the day of annual atonement, when the blood of the victim was carried by the high priest into the holy of holies. The goat that was slain on that occasion, and whose blood was presented before the mercy-seat, prefigured the vicarious death of Christ, and his entrance into heaven; the other, called the scape-goat, which, after having the sins of the congregation‡ * * * * *
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II. This part of our Saviour's character engages the attention and adoration of the heavenly world.

1. They adore this matchless display of love in his condescending to become man, to endure reproaches and sufferings, and at length to expire on the cross, to rescue the guilty from ruin. These benevolent spirits are not unaccustomed to perform kind offices for men: they often appeared, under the ancient economy, in visible form, to warn, to instruct, and to comfort; so they are still "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." But nothing which they ever performed bore any resemblance to the incarnation and sufferings of Jesus Christ.

On no other occasion did love ever stoop so low, endure so much, or operate in so free and spontaneous a manner. He who assumed nothing in making himself equal with God, "took upon him the form of a servant,

* Exod. xii. 7. 13. † 1 Cor. v. 7.
‡ Lev. xvi. 2, 20—34. Heb. ix. 7—15. § Heb. i. 14.

and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross."* In his mysterious descent, he passed by superior orders of being, to invest himself with human flesh. He who was the "Wonderful, the Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father," condescended to become the "Son given," and the "child born." And never was humiliation so deep, never was there reproach and infamy so extreme, as that which he endured. Loaded with the most shameful appellations, and persecuted throughout the whole of his life, in its last scenes he was arraigned before Pontius Pilate, smitten on the face, derided, clothed with mock robes, buffeted, scourged, spit upon. Never were there such indignities heaped on any head, as on that which was destined to wear many crowns. And, for his sufferings!—who can contemplate that hour of darkness in the garden of Gethsemane, when his soul was overwhelmed with amazement and horror; or behold his lingering torments on the cross, without being appalled? It is a trial to human fortitude to be obliged merely to think of what he actually endured. And for whom? For the sinners of Jerusalem! for many of that infatuated multitude who were impatient for his crucifixion: for some, there is reason to believe, who were employed in nailing him to the cross! for a Saul, who was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against his followers: for millions of proud and daring offenders, whom this unparalleled love was to soften and disarm!

2. They contemplate and adore, in the death of Christ, a new display of the divine perfections. The wisdom and the power of God are every way manifest. His goodness may be traced in innumerable portions of his works. He had displayed his justice in the punishment of fallen angels, who were reserved in chains of darkness against the judgement of the great day. But there remained a new view of the divine character. God was pleased to present himself in a new light to the adoration of his creatures. He was pleased to show, in the

* Phil. ii. 7, 8.

same transaction, the most determined hatred to sin, with the utmost compassion to the sinner; the most inflexible adherence to rectitude, with the utmost riches of grace to the undeserving;—"a just God, yet a Saviour." He resolved to exhibit, in the person of his Son, a new spectacle to the universe: a person the most majestic, and the most humble; the most powerful, and the most compassionate; an authority, which should subdue to itself all "principality;"—a Saviour, who should "feed his flock like a shepherd;"—"the Lion of the tribe of Judah," and "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

3. They rejoiced at the immense accession of happiness, which they perceived to flow from the death of Jesus Christ.

(1.) How safe is the worship of Christ!

(2.) How necessary to inquire how we stand affected toward the Saviour!

(3.) How much the supreme love of Christ, and a humble affiance in his merits, tends to prepare for the happiness of heaven!

XVI.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

PSALM cxlv. 11.—*They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom.*

THE absolute dominion of God, as the universal Proprietor and Lord, is an object which deserves most devoutly to be celebrated. It is, in fact, the frequent theme of the praises dictated under the inspiration of the Spirit in the sacred oracles. But there is another of the dominions of God, considered in relation to his saints,—an empire of knowledge and of love, whose administration is entrusted to his Son,—which is celebrated in still sublimer strains, and forms the principal theme of the New Testament. This is emphatically denominated the kingdom of heaven, or that kingdom which the God of heaven should set up, given to "the saints

of the Most High," which is to be of everlasting duration, and never to be succeeded by another. Whether the Psalm before us is intended to describe this species of rule and authority, in distinction from the other, I shall not undertake to determine; but, as these divine compositions are unquestionably frequently employed in portraying the kingdom of Christ or the Messiah, it is hoped it will not be deemed improper to consider the words in that light.

Let us direct our thoughts, then, for a short season, to the glory of the kingdom of Christ. With this [view], it may be proper to reflect on the following particulars:—

I. The glory of it is manifest in its origin and the method by which it was acquired. It had its origin in ineffable mercy, under the direction of perfect wisdom and rectitude. It occupied the thoughts, and was the object of the counsels, of the Eternal, before the heavens were stretched out, or the foundation of the earth was laid. It formed the centre of the divine designs, and the ultimate point to which every other purpose of God was directed. As it was designed to be the spiritual reign of God over the mind, and at the same time to be a [unanimous, harmonious] kingdom, in which the sovereign and the subjects are always understood to be of the same nature, it was necessary, in order to its establishment, that God should become incarnate; it was necessary, not only for the redemption of his church, but also for the purpose of their being governed as they were intended to be governed. Ere the government could be placed "on his shoulder," * it was necessary for the Messiah to be "a child born and a son given."

Again, since in this kingdom the "tabernacle of God" was to be "with men," and he was to "dwell amongst them," † and such a condescension of mercy would have been utterly unbecoming the "blessed and only Potentate," ‡ without a single reparation to the divine honour tarnished by rebellion, it was requisite a sacrifice for sin

* Isaiah ix. 6. † Rev. xxi. 3. ‡ 1 Tim. vi. 15.

should be made, worthy of the occasion, which could no where be procured but by "the offering of the body of Christ, once for all."* The inefficiency of the typical sacrifices under the law proclaimed the necessity of one of intrinsic validity and infinite value. Thus the foundation of this empire was laid in the incarnation and atonement of the Son of God; and the solidity and extent of its foundations, great as they are, are but proportioned to the majesty and duration of the edifice.

"Every battle of the warrior," says the prophet Isaiah, "is with confused noise, and with garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning, and fuel of fire."† The kingdom of which we speak is acquired by conquest, but of a nature totally different from military conquest. The weapons employed in achieving it are purely spiritual—the burning of conviction, the light of truth, the fire of love. The simple testimony of Christ, the publication of the gospel by the "foolishness of preaching," have produced the most wonderful changes in the world, far beyond those which have been effected by violence or the sword. Before these simple but efficacious instruments, the powers of darkness have been overcome; "Satan has fallen like lightning from heaven;"‡ temples have been overturned, oracles have been struck dumb, the arm of persecuting power has been withered; and men have, in every part of the world, passed through chains, and racks, and fires, into the kingdom of God. Heavenly truth, love, and wisdom have grappled with all the powers of falsehood and sophistry, combined with all the blandishments and terrors of the world, and have gained decisive victory. From the smallest beginnings, and by the most contemptible instruments to human appearance, the gospel, by "commending itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God," § hath triumphed over all opposition, and is still going forth "conquering, and to conquer." ||

It is thus the Spirit of God addresses the Messiah, in

* Heb. x. 10. † Isaiah ix. 5. ‡ Luke x. 18.
§ 2 Cor. iv. 2. || Rev. vi. 2.

portraying his success in the establishing of his empire: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O Most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty: And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee."* Truth, meekness, and righteousness are the weapons of his warfare, and the rod of his strength. They "shall be willing in the day of thy power;" they are a conquered, yet a willing people; they submit to his power, but cheerfully and gladly embrace his sceptre: their will itself is so changed, their hearts so touched, that they become "like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." †

Other potentates extend their empire by force, and by imposing their yoke on reluctant necks; Jesus Christ by love, and by exhibiting a matchless example of condescension and [mercy.]

2. The glory of this kingdom is conspicuous in the principles by which it is administered. Of this Prince it is truly said, "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth."‡ The sceptre of his dominion is grace: grace displayed in the gospel, grace communicated by the Spirit, is the grand instrument of maintaining his empire. He reveals his glory and imparts his benefits, and thereby attaches his subjects by ties at once the most forcible and the most engaging.

A lovely assemblage of qualities characterises the spirit and genius of his divine administration; an incomparable majesty, united to a most endearing condescension—a spirit of benignity, joined to impartial justice, distinguishes his conduct. Though the subjects of this kingdom are admitted to it on no other condition than a cordial approbation of the character of the Prince, they

* Psalm xlv. 3—5. † Cant. vi. 12. ‡ Isaiah xi. 3—5.

are not left lawless or uncontrolled; the revelation of the divine will is imparted; the most perfect measure of holiness, and rules of conduct, are enjoined on the conscience and impressed on the heart. This administration exhibits, throughout, a beautiful model of the moral government of God, attempered to the state of creatures who have fallen from their original rectitude, but are under a dispensation of mercy. A system of paternal justice is carried into execution throughout this empire; in consequence of which the disobedient are punished that they may not be condemned with the world. The gradations of favours are regulated by the Sovereign with the most impartial justice; and future rewards distributed [with exquisite propriety and rectitude.]

Human administrations extend only to outward actions, and are conducted entirely by external and visible instruments. Were we not united to a fleshly fabric, they would be incapable of reaching us: so that they extend more properly to the bodies than to the souls of men. The dominion of Christ is chiefly spiritual and internal; the soul is the subject of his authority, where he dwells by faith. It extends to the remotest sentiments of the mind, "casting down high imaginations, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."* It is not the object of our outward senses; it is within us, consisting not in "meats and drinks, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."†

The benefits which human governments impart are principally of a negative kind, consisting in the removal of those checks and restraints which the unreasonable passions of men urge them to impose on each other's enjoyments. The utmost that the wisest earthly government can, for the most part, effect, is to overawe the mischievous, to * * * * *

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II. It is glorious with respect to the manner in which it is administered: "The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be

* 2 Cor. x. 5. † Rom. xiv. 7.

just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light when the sun ariseth, even as a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by the clear shining after rain."*

The most essential quality in a virtuous administration, is justice. This property is most conspicuous in the government of Christ over his people. He confers no benefit upon them but what is compatible with the strictest rectitude, having previously made a sufficient atonement for their transgressions. And in every part of his administration, "righteousness is the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."† With perfect equity he apportions the degrees of his favour to the respective measures of their attachment and obedience. He will render to such of his subjects rewards, not properly on account of their works, but "according to their works."‡ He employs the pure and holy law of God, as the invariable rule of their conduct, and shows how to make such a use of its terrors and sanctions, as is subservient to his gracious designs; restraining by fear those who are not susceptible of more liberal and generous motives. As it first convinced them of sin, so it is, in his hands, the instrument of such convictions as the measure of their offence may require; and, by alarming and awakening the conscience, it excites to repentance, vigilance, and prayer: "As many as I love, I rebuke," is his language; "be zealous therefore, and repent,"§ "for I have not found thy works perfect before God."||

His dominion is at the same time most gentle, gracious, and benign. Grace, as I have said, is the sceptre of his empire; and that grace is imparted by the Spirit. His reign is indeed "the reign of grace."¶ He reveals his glory, he manifests ineffable majesty and beauty, whereby he captivates the hearts of his subjects, and "draws them with the cords of a man, and the bands of love."** With the most tender compassion he "delivers

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4. † Isaiah xi. 5. ‡ Matt. xvi. 27.
§ Rev. iii. 19. || Rev. iii. 2. ¶ Rom. v. 21.
** Hos. xi. 4.

the needy when he crieth, the poor, and him that hath no helper. He spares the poor and the needy, and saves the souls of the needy:"* "When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."†

In earthly kingdoms the subjects are governed merely by general laws, which are, of necessity, very imperfectly adapted to the infinite variety of cases that occur. The combinations of human action are too numerous and diversified to be adequately included in any general regulation or enactment; whence has arisen the maxim, "*Summum jus, summa injuria*,"—that a strict adherence to the letter of the law would often be the greatest injustice. But this divine dominion subsists under no such imperfections; for the Prince is intimately acquainted with the secrets of the heart. He also pervades every part of his empire by his presence, and can, consequently, make a specific and personal application to each individual; can impart his smiles and his favours, the expression of his kindness or of his displeasure, to each individual soul, as distinctly as though it were the only subject of his empire.

In human government the law extends to outward actions only, but the good and the evil which are produced by it are almost entirely confined to sensible objects—to such objects as bear a relation to our corporeal state.

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* Psalm lxxii. 13. † Isaiah xli. 17, 18.

XVII.

ON SPIRITUAL LEPROSY.

Lev. xiii. 45.—*And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.**

By superficial thinkers, it has been objected to several parts of the Mosaic law, that its injunctions are frivolous and minute, and of a nature that ill comports with the majesty and wisdom of the Supreme Being. The exact specification of the different sorts of sacrifice, the enumeration of the different sorts of creatures, clean and unclean, and the various species of ceremonial defilement, have been adduced as examples of this kind. To this it may be replied, that, at this distance of time, we know too little of the superstitions among pagan nations, and consequently of the peculiar temptations to which the ancient Israelites were exposed, to enable us to form an accurate judgement respecting the expediency or necessity of those provisions. Many legal enactments, which appear unreasonable and unnecessary to a distant observer and a remote age, on close investigation of the actual circumstances in which they were, are discovered to be replete with propriety, and to be founded on the highest reason. But the most satisfactory answer to this, and to most other objections raised against the law of Moses, is derived from a consideration of the peculiar nature of that institute, which was throughout figurative and typical. In the infancy of revealed religion, and when the minds of men were but little accustomed to refined reflection, it became necessary to communicate moral and religious instruction by actions and observances, and to address their reason through the medium of their senses. The people of Israel, at the time they came out of the land of Egypt, having been long surrounded by idolatry, and in a state of depression and

* Preached at Leicester, December. 1810.

slavery, were a people, we have the utmost reason to believe, of very gross conceptions, deeply sunk in carnality and ignorance; a nation peculiarly disqualified to receive any lasting impression from didactic discourses, or from any sublime system of instruction. Their minds were in an infantine state; and divine wisdom was imparted to them,—not in that form which was best in itself, but in that in which they were best able to bear it: and being very much the creatures of sense, religious principles were communicated through the medium of sensible images. Thus they were reminded of the eternal difference betwixt right and wrong, betwixt actions innocent and criminal, by the distinctions of animals and meats into clean and unclean. Their attention was called to a reflection on their guilt, on their just desert of destruction, and of the necessity of a real expiation of sin hereafter to be made in the person of the Saviour, by the institution of sacrifices, without the shedding of whose blood there was no remission. To convince them of the inherent defilement attached to sin, and of the necessity of being purified from it by a method of God's devising, it was enjoined that several incidents, such as touching a dead body, the disease of leprosy, and some others, should be considered as polluting the person whom they befell; in consequence of which, they were pronounced unclean, and separated from the camp and the tabernacle. In allusion to the ceremonial uncleanness contracted by touching a dead body, St. Paul, that infallible interpreter of the import of the Mosaic law, styles evil dispositions "dead works."—"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*

To every instance of ceremonial defilement, there are two circumstances attached.

* Heb. ix. 13, 14.

1. The forfeiture of certain privileges, especially that of approaching God in his sanctuary.

2. A representation of the defiling nature of sin.

But of all the various sorts of ceremonial uncleanness, there is none which appears to have had so much a typical import as the case of leprosy, which, accordingly, occupies more room in the enactments of the Levitical law than all the others put together; and is treated of with a niceness of distinction, and a particularity of detail, peculiar to itself. Not less than two very long chapters of this book* are devoted to the ascertaining of the signs of this disease, and prescribing the methods of legal purification; so that no one, who believes there is any thing whatever of a typical nature in the laws of Moses, can doubt of the regulations respecting leprosy being emphatically so. It is my full conviction of this which has induced me to make it the ground of this discourse. If we set ourselves to inquire for what reason the leprosy was selected in the Mosaic ritual, as the most eminent representation of moral defilement, we shall perceive there was something very singular in this affair. Besides its being fitted for this purpose as it was a very dreadful and loathsome disease, there is the utmost reason to believe it was supernatural. Those who have travelled into eastern countries make mention, indeed, of a distemper under the name of leprosy; but there is much room to doubt of its being the same which is treated of in the books of Moses. If you read the rules prescribed there for ascertaining its existence, you will find certain circumstances to which there is nothing parallel in any disease now existing in the world: for it attached itself not only to the bodies of men but to garments and to houses; it affected the very stones of buildings, fretting and consuming them.† A considerable part of the laws on this subject respect its subsist-

* Lev. xiii. xiv.

† Read carefully Lev. xiv. 34—45. Michaelis, and others, have endeavoured to prove that the leprosy of the Old Testament is, in no case, supernatural; but their reasonings are, in my judgement, far from satisfactory.—Ed.

ence in houses, which in certain cases were ordered to be completely demolished, and the materials cast into an unclean place without the city. It seems to have been inflicted by the immediate hand of God: "When ye be come into the land of Canaan, which I give to you for a possession," the Lord is introduced as saying, "and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession; and he that owneth the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, It seemeth to me there is as it were a plague in the house."* In various periods of the Old Testament history, we find it inflicted as an immediate judgement of God; as in the case of Moses, Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah. After it was cured, it was suffered sometimes to spread again. By this awful visitation, the inhabitants of the house were forcibly reminded and admonished of their sins: and is it possible to conceive of a ceremony more adapted to strike a stupid and insensible people with awe?

The typical import of this kind of ceremonial defilement leads us to consider sin in the following lights:—

I. As an alarming, dreadful disease, for such the leprosy unquestionably was. There are spiritual diseases, as well as bodily, and the former much more to be dreaded. These diseases may all be resolved into sin. As the human frame consists not merely in a number of parts put together in the same place, but of parts vitally united, all with their separate functions and due subserviency to each other, which gives us the idea of a system; so the mind consists of faculties and powers designed to act under due subordination to each other. Sin disturbs this harmony, confounds this order, and consequently is truly and properly in the mind what disease is in the body. In the Holy Scriptures it is compared to the most afflicting disorders;—to blindness, deafness, lethargy; and the removal of it is expressed by healing. "Lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should

* Lev. xiv. 34, 35.

heal them."* Sin is a fretting leprosy; it spreads itself throughout all the principles and powers; and [wherever it spreads imparts its own malignity.]

II. It defiles as well as disorders.—Like the leprosy it is a most loathsome disease; it is *filthiness* of flesh and of spirit. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."† "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."‡

III. It cuts off those in whom it prevails from communion with God, both penally and naturally; that is, by the force of judicial sentence, and by its natural influence.

IV. To those who have just apprehensions of it, it will be productive of that sorrowful sense of guilt and unworthiness, so forcibly expressed in the words of the text.

XVIII.

ON SPIRITUAL LEPROSY.

Lev. xiii. 45.—*And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.*§

In this discourse, we propose to make an improvement of the former, which treated of the spiritual import of the Mosaic law concerning lepers. Having shown that the ceremonial defilement, incurred by leprosy, was designed as a standing representation of the polluting nature of sin, and the legal method of purification,—a type of the manner in which the power and pollution of sin are removed under the gospel,—I shall proceed to attempt applying the whole doctrine to the character and circumstances of my hearers.

1. Let the doctrine be improved into an occasion of

* Isaiah vi. 10. John xii. 40. † Psalm xix. 12. ‡ Psalm li. 2.

§ Preached at Leicester, December, 1810.

inquiring whether *we* are healed, or are yet under the leprosy of sin. When we hear of the ravages of so dreadful a disorder, supposing we give any sort of credit to the report, it is natural to inquire into our own situation, and to consider how far we are in danger of being overtaken with it. During the prevalence of an epidemic disorder, accompanied especially with symptoms of danger, prudent men are wont to manifest great solicitude to avoid the places and occasions of infection. In the case before us there is ground for much serious inquiry peculiar to itself. The leprosy of sin is not like some other disorders which affect some individuals alone, while others escape; it is a universal malady,—no child of Adam escapes it; it attaches to the whole human race; and the only persons who are not now involved in that calamity, are such as are *cured*, *saved*, redeemed from among men;—terms which in their most obvious import imply the former prevalence of disease. The bitter fruits of human apostasy extend to each individual of the human race, as may be sufficiently inferred from the very appellation of Christ, the Saviour of the world, "he shall be for salvation unto the ends of the earth,"* as well as from the most express declarations of scripture respecting the universal prevalence of guilt and corruption, in all instances where it has not been counteracted and controlled by divine grace: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."†

Since this is the case, if you are not now in a *state* of sin, yet as you were so formerly, you have undergone a great change, and must consequently have some recollection of the circumstances attending it; and though you may not perhaps be able to specify the precise moment of your conversion, some traces must remain upon your memory of the circumstances connected with an event so replete with important consequences. In the course of

* Acts xiii. 47. † Eph. ii. 3.

our discussion on this subject, we have observed, that the cure of sin must be preceded by a sense of the malady, by a humiliating conviction of defilement, urging us to cry with the leper, "Unclean, unclean." Did any ever witness in you this appearance of concern for sin, this apprehension of your misery as a guilty creature before God? Were you ever heard, we will not say to cry out in a public assembly, as did the three thousand that were converted by Peter, but in the most private intercourse with a christian friend, and inquire what you must do to be saved? Are you conscious to yourselves of having ever felt serious and lasting solicitude on that head? Did it ever rest with a weight upon your mind at all proportioned to what you have felt on other occasions of distress? Was it ever allowed to put a check to your worldly amusements, to your gay diversions, or to the pursuit of any scheme whatever, from which you could promise yourselves profit or pleasure?

We will take occasion, in treating on the subject before us, to observe that the only method of deliverance from the malady of sin is a devout and humble application to the Lord Jesus; for he, and he only, "shall save his people from their sins;"* and now, not less than in the days of his flesh, it is his prerogative to say, "I will; be thou clean."† Supposing you thus to have applied, and to have succeeded in your suit, you must have some remembrance of those solemn transactions betwixt Christ and your soul. You can recall the season when you committed yourselves into the hands of the Redeemer; when, like the leper in the gospel, you fell at his feet, crying, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Your struggles after the Saviour, your attempts to believe, accompanied with prayer that he would help your unbelief, and the rest you have found in him after being tossed by the storm, cannot all have passed like the fleeting images of a dream, without leaving some traces in your mind not easily effaced. If you are conscious that nothing of this nature has taken place, if you re-

* Matt. i. 21. † Matt. viii. 3.

collect no such transactions, you may be assured they never took place.

Waving, however, these points of inquiry, and admitting it to be possible that all this may have disappeared from your mind, still, since sin is a universal malady from which none are naturally exempted, if you are now healed, you must be conscious of your being very different from what you formerly were. Admitting you can give no account of the circumstances or time of your cure, yet you can at least say with him in the gospel, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Your taste, inclination, and pursuits, must have undergone a great alteration; and, whereas you were formerly alienated from God, and took no delight in him, he is now your avowed and deliberate end, your chosen portion. Whereas you were formerly utterly disinclined to prayer, it is now your constant practice, and considered as a high privilege. "Led captive" formerly "by Satan at his will," borne away by the tide of sensual inclination or corrupt example, you now feel yourselves endowed with spiritual power, so as to overcome temptation; and, having the seed of grace remaining, you keep yourselves that so "the wicked one toucheth you not." The Lord Jesus Christ, who appeared to you formerly "like a root out of a dry ground, without any beauty or comeliness in him for which you should desire him," is now in your eyes "the branch of the Lord, beautiful and glorious; the fruit of the earth, comely and pleasant." The knowledge of him, instead of being tasteless and insipid, you now find to be of [such] high and superlative excellence, that you account all things but loss in the comparison; nay, you esteem them "but dung that you may win Christ." You feel, it may be, some remains of your ancient distemper; but you feel at the same time that its power is broken, that the prescriptions of your physician have wrought kindly, and that you are not far from a complete cure.

But if you are conscious of being strangers to all this, you may rest assured your disorder remains in its full force. Nor let any flatter themselves that things are well

with them because their external conduct is decent and regular, and they are exempt from the grosser acts of immorality, while they remain alienated from God, forgetful of his presence, unawed by his authority, insensible to his goodness, strangers to his converse. In this alienation lies the very core and essence of sin; this is the "evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God;" this is the radical distemper, of which the diversified forms of iniquity in men's lives are but the symptoms and effects. This aversion to God, this inaptitude to be influenced by considerations and motives derived from his blessed nature and holy will, is the seminal principle of all wickedness; it is the [universal,] the pervading malady, which attaches to apostate spirits, as well as to apostate men, and the only one of which disembodied spirits are capable; and which [leagues] the disobedient and rebellious in all parts of the universe in one grand confederacy against God and goodness. Till this is subdued, nothing is in reality done towards the recovery of lost souls. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart;"* and, in consequence of this, that which is highly esteemed among men is, not unfrequently, an abomination in his sight. "There is," the Scriptures tell us, "a generation who are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness;"† and they who value themselves on the correct exterior of their conduct, while their heart is not turned to God, are precisely that generation.

II. The second improvement to which the subject naturally leads, is a reflection on the misery of those who are yet under the power and defilement of sin. Happy should we esteem ourselves, could we impress upon the consciences of such, an adequate idea of their misery. "Then said" the prophet "Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the

* 1 Sam. xvi. 7. † Prov. xxx. 12.

Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean."*

To be under the power and pollution of sin, is to be odious in the sight of God; and what inexpressible degradation is comprehended in this idea! For the eye of God's holiness to be averted from us, to have no share in his complacency, to be in a situation in which his essential attributes are engaged for our destruction, is a conception, which, if you come to realize it, is replete with horror. To have "the wrath of God abiding on you" is a calamity which, one would suppose, must drink up your spirit, and completely destroy whatever satisfaction you might naturally derive from other objects. Till this plague is removed, cheerfulness is folly, and laughter is madness. However prosperous your outward condition, however successful your worldly pursuits, however ample your fortune, or elevated your rank, they are no just occasion of joy to you, any more than the garland which decorates the victim prepared for slaughter. "Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God."† There are many circumstances calculated to afford a degree of joy; the blessings so plenteously showered down on the path of life, are adapted in themselves to exhilarate the heart, and to diffuse a ray of cheerfulness over the soul; but to him that is under the wrath of the Almighty, if they afford high gratification, it must be in consequence of his forgetfulness of his true situation. We should pity the insensibility of the man who could delight himself with the dainties of a feast, while a sword was suspended over his head by a single hair;‡ the danger of whose situation is however, not to be compared with being every moment exposed to "the wrath of God." While you continue in your sins, you have not the shadow of security against overwhelming and hopeless destruction: at

* Haggai. ii. 13, 14. † Hos. ix. 1.

‡ See Horace, lib. iii. carm. 1.

"Districtus ensis cui super impia
Cervice pendet, non Siculæ dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporem."—Ed.

any moment, in the midst of your amusements, your business, your repose, whether at home or abroad, in company or in solitude, you are liable to the arrest of justice; to be cast out into that eternal prison, from whence you can never escape "till you have paid the uttermost farthing." The Being that fills with his presence the immensity of space—the Being "in whom you live, and move, and have your being," who can crush you in a moment, and who has engaged to recompense his enemies, and "reward them that hate him," is incensed at you, and laughs at your insensibility, because he knows that your hour is coming.

III. The subject before us suggests the strongest motives for an immediate application to the methods of cure. Were sin a tolerable distemper it might be endured; were it entirely or in every sense incurable, it must be submitted to. But as things are actually situated, there is no necessity for you to pine away in your iniquities; for, though you cannot recover yourselves by any native unaided power of yours, though in this light your [hopelessness] be deep, and your wound incurable, yet there is a method of recovery revealed in the gospel, which millions have tried with success. "There *is* balm in Gilead, there is a Physician there."* By the discoveries it makes of the placability of the Divine Being, and the actual constitution of a Redeemer, the gospel is essentially a restorative dispensation. It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,"†

We have observed, in the course of our discussion of this subject, that the evils attached to sin are twofold: guilt, which is a legal obstruction to an approach to God, and renders the sinner liable to eternal death; and pollution, which disqualifies him for happiness.

To the former, the blood of the Redeemer, "sprinkled upon the conscience," is a sovereign antidote: "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin."‡ The great design of his coming into this world, was to render that

* Jer. viii. 22. † Rom. i. 16. ‡ 1 John i. 7

reparation to divine justice for the injury it had sustained by the transgressions of men, which it had been otherwise impossible to make; and thus, in consistency with the divine law, to admit repenting sinners to mercy. "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near."*

With respect to the power and pollution of sin, its efficacy in retaining the soul in bondage; this also admits of relief in the gospel. There is a Spirit, we have often occasion to remind you, which can liberate the soul, and diffuse freedom, light, and purity through all its powers. "The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death."† "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."‡ If you are willing to be made clean, if you sincerely implore the savour of divine grace, it will not long be withheld from you. "He will give his Holy Spirit unto them that ask him."§ "If you will turn at his reproof, he will pour out his Spirit unto you, and make known his words unto you."|| "He is willing to heal your backslidings, to receive you graciously, and love you freely."¶

If you are so much in love with your distemper, indeed, as to determine, at all events, not to part with it, your case is hopeless; and nothing remains but for you to die in your sins, under the additional guilt you incur by refusing the remedy which Infinite Wisdom has prepared. At present, God is expostulating with you, in the language of an ancient prophet, "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?"** "Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?"††

You have met with many occurrences calculated to

* Heb. x. 19–22. † Rom. viii. 2. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 17.
§ Luke xi. 13. || Prov. i. 23. ¶ Hos. xiv. 4.
** Jer. iv. 14. †† Jer. xiii. 27.

bring your sin to your remembrance: in various respects, God has walked contrary to you, and has probably often visited you with severe chastisements. Your bodies have been reduced by sickness, your families visited with death; and under some of these strokes you were for a while stunned, and formed some feeble resolution of forsaking your sins, and devoting yourselves to a religious life. But what are the fruits? No sooner was the first smart of your affliction [abated,] than you returned to your course, and became as inattentive to the concerns of your soul as ever. God only knows, whether he will grant you any more warnings; whether he will wait upon you any longer; whether he will ever again visit you in mercy; or whether he will pronounce on you that awful sentence recorded in Ezekiel:---"Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent: according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord God."*

XIX.

ON COUNTING THE COST.

LUKE xiv. 28.—*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?*

AMONG the many excellencies which distinguish the character of our Lord, as the author and founder of a new religion, we perceive, throughout the whole of his conduct, a most transparent simplicity and candour. He disdained, on any occasion, to take advantage of the

* Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14.

ignorance or inexperience of the persons with whom he conversed; never stooping to the low arts of popularity, nor attempting to swell the number of his followers by a concealment of the truth. He availed himself of no sudden surprise, no momentary enthusiasm arising from the miracles which he wrought, or the benefits which he conferred. The attachment which he sought, and which he valued, was the result of mature conviction, founded on the evidence of his claims, and combined with a distinct foresight of the consequences, near and remote, which would follow from becoming his disciples. Conscious of the solidity of the foundation on which his title to universal and devoted obedience rested, he challenged the strictest scrutiny. Knowing that his promises would more than compensate all the sacrifices he might require, and all the sufferings to which his disciples might be exposed, he was not solicitous to throw a veil over either; but rather chose to set them in the strongest light, that none might be induced to enlist under his banners, but such as were "called, and chosen, and faithful." He felt no desire to be surrounded by a crowd of ignorant and superficial admirers, ready to make him a king to-day, and to cry, "Crucify him, crucify him," to-morrow; but by a band, "whose hearts God had touched," prepared through good and evil report to follow him to prison and to death. Such, with the exception of one, were his twelve apostles; such the hundred and twenty disciples who were assembled at Jerusalem after his ascension; and such the character of those whom he will acknowledge as his at a future day.

Let me request your serious attention, while, in dependence on divine assistance, we attempt the improvement of this passage, by showing,

I. What is the *cost* attending the Christian profession.

II. Why is it necessary to *count* the cost; and,

III. The reasons which ought to determine our adherence to Christ, whatever that cost may be.

I. We are to consider the *cost* of the christian profession. The cost attending [this profession] relates, either to what it requires us to renounce; or what we

are to expect; or the term and duration of the engagement.

1. In order to be the disciples of Christ, there is much that we must instantly renounce. It is a profession of *holiness:* it, therefore, demands the immediate renunciation of criminal and forbidden pleasures. The moment we become Christ's disciples, we commence a warfare with the flesh, engaging for its crucifixion, with all its sinful lusts and appetites. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts."* To the severities of monastic discipline, in which the body is torn by scourges, and emaciated by abstaining from the nourishment required to sustain it in health and vigour, the religion of Christ is a stranger. "For every creature of God is good, if it be received with thanksgiving."† But a soft, voluptuous, and sensual life, is repugnant, not only to the example of Christ, but to the whole genius and spirit of his institutes. By his gospel, and by his Son, God has "called us, not to *uncleanness*, but to holiness;"‡ so that he that despiseth the precepts of purity, despiseth not man, but God: "This is the will of God, even our sanctification, that every man should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, as the Gentiles which know not God."§ However painful the sacrifice of forbidden gratifications may be, however deep and inveterate the habit of indulgence; though it may seem as necessary to us, and as much a part of ourselves, as the right hand, or the right eye; relinquished it must be, or we cannot be Christ's disciples. A life of sinful pleasure is not the life of a man, much less is it the life of a christian; "He that liveth in pleasure" (it is the language of inspiration) "is dead while he liveth."‖ Let me urge every one present to count the cost in this particular, and if he is not firmly determined, in the strength of divine grace "to abstain from those fleshly lusts which war against the soul," let him not pollute the

* Gal. v. 24. † 1 Tim. iv. 4. ‡ 1 hess. iv. 7.
§ 1 Thess. iv. 3—5. ‖ 1 Tim. v. 6.

name of the holy and immaculate Lamb of God by associating it with his own. Such an association is his abhorrence, which he will testify in a future day; and he will vindicate his insulted purity by a final renunciation and disclaimer, saying, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity: I never knew you."*

2. The christian profession is *spiritual*, and therefore requires the renunciation of the world. The words of our Lord in this particular are decisive. "So, likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple."† In the interpretation of these words, we must undoubtedly distinguish between the spirit and the letter. In the ordinary circumstances of the christian profession, a literal compliance with this requirement would lead to pernicious consequences; to a relinquishment of the duties proper to our station, and a disorganization of society: but still they have an important meaning. They present the relation of a disciple to the present world in a very solemn and instructive light. They intimate, at their lowest estimate, that the relation he bears to the present state and world, is that of "a stranger and pilgrim;" that the relation in which it stands to him, is that of an entire and absolute subordination to the glory of Christ and the interests of eternity. At the first opening of the gospel dispensation, the sacrifice of all secular advantages, the disruption of the tender ties which connect parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and the dearest friends, was not unfrequently the inevitable consequence of an adherence to Christ. The necessity of literally forsaking all was a usual appendage of the Christian profession. There was therefore a great propriety in placing the engagements of a disciple in this strong and forcible light, which, however, prescribe nothing more than what is irrevocably binding on us under similar circumstances. To regard every worldly interest, at all times, with an attachment subordinate to the love of Christ; to treasure up our chief happiness in him, and to be willing to "for-

* Matt. vii. 23. † Luke xiv. 33.

sake all," whenever the following him renders it necessary; are absolutely essential to the becoming his disciples.

On this ground, my christian brethren, let each of us try our religious pretensions. If you wish to carry into the christian profession the weight of worldly incumbrance, a heart corroded by its passions, and agitated with its cares; if you are desirous of uniting the service of God and of Mammon, and think of presenting to Christ a few small relics of your time, occupied in the cold formalities of a dead and heartless religion, you cannot be his disciples. The world must be displaced from the throne, or Christ will not, cannot, enter; since he will never condescend to occupy a subordinate place. Alas! what multitudes are there, (there is reason to fear) who are fatally deceived in this particular; and who, while they form a high estimate of their character as christians, have not "the Spirit of Christ," and are therefore, "none of his!"*

3. In order to be a disciple, it is necessary, in the concerns of conscience, to renounce every authority but that of Christ. The connexion of a christian with the Saviour is not merely that of a disciple with his teacher; it is the relation of a subject to his prince. "One is your Master, even Christ."† "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me."‡ In the whole course of our lives, if we are indeed his disciples, we shall evince our allegiance by a conscientious observance of his laws, by an implicit submission to his will, together with a sincere desire of ascertaining more and more of his mind and purpose. "We shall call no man master upon earth," nor dare to trifle with the least of his injunctions; and while we plead the merits of his death and the perfection of his righteousness as the alone ground of hope, we shall reverence him as a Sovereign, who is entitled to that spiritual, that interior, obedience of the heart, which is suited to the character of him who searches it. He who trusts in him as his Saviour, must obey him as his

* Rom. viii. 9. † Matt. xxiii. 8. ‡ John x. 27.

Lord; nor shall any be washed in his blood who will not submit to his sceptre.

The moment Paul was brought to a saving acquaintance with Christ, he wrought in him a most profound sense of his majesty; a most humble and reverential submission to his will. His proud, intractable heart melted like wax before the sun, till, passive and subdued under the hand of Christ, he exclaims, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" While you prefer submission to any other yoke, while the dictates of any other authority have more power over you than the precepts of Christ, dream not of being his disciples. It is absolutely impossible.

4. The cost of which we are speaking relates to what we are to expect. In general, to commence the profession of a Christian, is to enter upon a formidable and protracted warfare; it is to engage in an arduous contest, in which many difficulties are to be surmounted, many enemies overcome. The path that was trod by the great Leader, is that which must be pursued by all his followers. If *he* found his way strewed only with flowers, if *his* career was cheered with acclamations and greeted with smiles, you may not unreasonably indulge in like expectations. But if his course, on the contrary, was a course of trial and effort, of affliction and discouragement; if a life of poverty and suffering, closed by a death of ignominy and agony, form the principal features of his history, regulate your expectations accordingly. "It is sufficient for the servant to be as his Master, the disciple as his Lord." "If they call the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household." "Marvel not," saith our Lord, "if the world hate you; it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."* "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world, that in me ye might have peace."†

* John xv. 18, 19. † John xvi. 33.

Though violent persecution is not an event, under the present circumstances of the christian profession in this country, within the range of probability, yet serious and painful opposition may be expected. Vigorous attempts will be made to deprive you of your crown, at one time by an assault on your doctrinal, at another, by efforts to corrupt your practical, principles. A strong current will set in from the world to obstruct your progress, swelled by the confluence of false opinions, corrupt customs, ensnaring examples, and all the elements of vice, error, and impiety, which are leagued in a perpetual confederacy against God and his Christ. Your path will often be beset, not merely by the avowed patrons of error, but by such as "hold the truth in unrighteousness;" who, never having experienced the renovating power of divine truth, will be among the first and foremost to ridicule and oppose its genuine influence. While you live like the world, you may, with impunity, think with the church: but let the doctrines you profess descend from the head to the heart, and produce there the contrition, the humility, the purity, the separation from the world which distinguish the new creature, that world will be armed against you. "They think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you."* In order to stand your ground, it will be requisite for you to "quit yourselves like men, and be strong." Aware that he is everywhere, and at all times, surrounded with danger, the life of a christian is a life of habitual watchfulness; in solitude, in company; at home, abroad; in repose and in action; in a state of suffering, or a state of enjoyment; in the shade of privacy, or in the glare of publicity. Aware of his incessant liability to be ensnared, he feels it incumbent on him to watch. The melancholy history of the falls of Noah, of David, and of Peter, is adapted and designed to teach us this lesson.

An opportunity may present itself, perhaps, in your future course, of growing suddenly rich, of making, at

* 1 Pet. iv. 4.

least, a considerable accession to your property; but it involves the sacrifice of principle, the adoption of some crooked and sinister policy, some palpable violation of the golden rule; or, to put it in the most favourable light, such an immersion of your mind in the cares and business of the world, as will leave no leisure for retirement; no opportunity for "exercising yourself unto godliness;" no space for calm meditation, and the serious perusal of the Scriptures. Are you prepared, in such a conjuncture, to reject the temptation; or are you resolved, at all events, to make haste to get rich, though it may plunge you into the utmost spiritual danger? "Count the cost;" for with such a determination you cannot be Christ's disciple.

By the supposition with which we set out, you have solemnly renounced the indulgence of sinful pleasures. But recollect that Siren will return to the charge, she will renew her solicitations a thousand and a thousand times; she will sparkle in your eyes, she will address her honied accents to your ears, she will assume every variety of form, and will deck herself with a nameless variety of meretricious embellishments and charms, if haply at some one unguarded moment she may entangle you in those "fleshly lusts which war against the soul." "Count the cost." Are you prepared to shut your eyes, to close your ears, and to persist in a firm, everlasting denial?

You will meet with injuries, and unjust provocations: "count the cost" in this respect.

5. The cost of the christian profession stands related to the *term* and duration of the engagement—"Be thou faithful unto death." It is coeval with life.

II. Why, we say, is it expedient for those who propose to become christians to "count the cost?"

1. It will obviate a sense of ridicule and of shame. (See the context.)

2. It will render the cost less formidable when it occurs.

3. If it diminishes the number of those who make a public and solemn profession, this will be more than re-

trieved by the superior character of those who make it. The church will be spared much humiliation; Satan and the world deprived of many occasions of triumph.

III. The reasons which should determine our adherence to Christ, notwithstanding the cost which attends it.

1. His absolute right to command or claim our attachment.

2. The pain attending the sacrifices necessary to the christian profession greatly alleviated from a variety of sources.

3. No comparison betwixt the cost and the advantages.

XX.

PARALLEL BETWEEN THE WAR WITH THE CANAANITISH NATIONS, AND THAT OF BELIEVERS WITH THEIR SPIRITUAL ENEMIES.*

Joshua v. 13—15.—*And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay: but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.*

Joshua was at this time entering upon a most arduous undertaking; that of attacking the nations of Canaan, at the command of God, with a view to put the Israelites in possession of that land which God had sworn to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, he would bestow on their posterity. Joshua had just been invested with the office of the leader of the chosen people in the room of Moses, who was dead; he had witnessed their frequent rebellions against his predecessor, who had claims to

* Preached at Leicester, March, 1814.

their obedience peculiar to himself; and he had great reason to apprehend, that the spirit of perverseness and insubordination, which occasioned so much uneasiness, would burst out against him with additional violence. Added to this, the enterprise on which he was entering was, in itself, extremely difficult and formidable.

The miraculous appearance presented to him on this occasion was probably intended to obviate his fears, and to arm him with an undaunted resolution in accomplishing the arduous duties assigned him. It is generally agreed by the most judicious commentators, that the personage who presented himself to Joshua at this time was no other than he who afterwards became incarnate, —"the Son of God," "the Angel of the Covenant," and "the Captain of our salvation." From his commanding Joshua to pull his shoes from off his feet, assuring him the ground whereon he stood was holy, he could not fail to infer, that he who addressed him was a divine person; these being the identical words addressed to Moses when God appeared to him in the burning bush.*

We may learn, from various passages in the New Testament, that the Lord Jesus Christ, in his pre-existent state, presided over the Jewish nation, conducted it through the wilderness, and communicated that spirit of inspiration by which its succession of prophets was actuated.

It is to those divine manifestations of himself in the ancient church, there is reason to believe, St. Paul refers, when, contrasting the pre-existent state of Christ with his appearance while on earth, he attributes to him the form of God, "who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God."†

Nothing can be conceived more adapted to support the mind of this great man of God, and enable him to encounter every obstacle with fortitude, than such a divine manifestation; by which he was assured the Son of God himself undertook the conduct of the war, and the discomfiture of his foes.

* Exod. iii. 5. † Phil. ii. 6.

The certainty of God being engaged on their side is, in every age, the chief support of the christian Israel, in the conflict they are called to sustain with their spiritua enemies.

The present state of the church of God is justly styled a militant state, which is the chief distinction between its present and future condition. An everlasting victory is in prospect, when all enemies will be placed under its feet. In the mean while, whoever belongs to the true Israel of God is engaged in the serious and momentous contest, which bears, in many points, a striking and designed resemblance to the wars which the tribes of Israel, under the conduct of Joshua, waged with the inhabitants of Canaan.

As I conceive, if we attempt to trace a resemblance, it may possibly minister to our instruction and improvement, I shall confine the following discourse to that point.

I. The war in which the tribes of Israel were engaged was of divine appointment. It was a holy war,—not originating in the enmity or ambition of the people who undertook it, but in the sovereign will and pleasure of God, who had promised, ages back, to put them in possession of the land of Canaan; but resolved, for the wisest ends, that the actual possession of it should be the fruit of conquest.

The warfare in which christians are engaged, in like manner, is of divine prescription; it is one to which they are solemnly called. The enemies they are called to combat are God's enemies; and it is his will that we shall yield ourselves as instruments in his hand for their destruction.

In resisting the world, the flesh, and the devil, we are executing his commands, and are consecrating our services to the Most High. To be resolute and determined in this warfare, is to enter into the very essence of our christian calling; and it is the principal test of our fidelity and allegiance to the King of kings. Our Saviour has distinctly exhibited them in his word, has set us in

battle array against them, and says to us, These are my enemies, and also yours, and you must destroy them.

While we remain in a state of unregeneracy, we are scarcely aware of the existence of these enemies. We have no apprehension of danger, and consequently seem to ourselves to be in a [region] of peace and safety. But no sooner are the "eyes of the understanding enlightened," than a new scene presents itself, and we perceive ourselves to be encompassed with foes, and are at once convinced that no representation of the christian calling is more just than that which likens it to a warfare.

II. The nations of the Canaanites, whom the Israelites were commanded to expel, were extremely numerous and formidable. So they appeared to the spies who were sent by Moses to search out the land. "The land," say they, "floweth with milk and honey: nevertheless, the people be strong, and the cities are walled, and very great: and we saw the children of Anak there. We be not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we; all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature; and there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were, in our own sight, as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."*

Moses himself frequently reminds the Israelites of the obligations they will be under to love and serve God, when he shall have "subdued under them nations stronger and more numerous than they."

Here we may infer, with certainty, that there was naturally no proportion betwixt the strength of the Israelites and that of the people they were appointed to subdue. The victory to which they aspired was not to be achieved by their own power;—they were encouraged by the assurance that the Lord would fight for them,—which is abundantly verified in the events recorded in the book of Joshua. Thus the enemies which obstruct our salvation are numerous and formidable, far

* Numb. xiii. 27, 31—33.

exceeding our active powers of resistance; so that we could entertain no hope of success, were we abandoned to our own unassisted efforts.

Who could flatter himself with the expectation of vanquishing the assaults and escaping the snares of his great adversary; quelling the motions of the flesh, and overcoming the temptations of the world, if he had no hope of superior succour? Never were forces brought into the field more unequally matched, than the power and subtlety of Satan, enforced by the influence of the world and the treachery and corruption of our own hearts, and the naked, unaided efforts of a feeble worm.

When we consider the perfect subjection to which the far greater part of mankind are reduced under these their spiritual enemies, and the havoc and destruction they are continually making of souls, we shall be convinced of the propriety of scripture language, when it speaks of "the powers of darkness:" "To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." These enemies have triumphed over the greatest potentates, have held in invisible chains the greatest of men, and tyrannized, with little or no resistance, over those who have been the terror of the mighty in the land of the living.

III. God was pleased to assign to the people of Israel a leader, who, under God, was to marshal their forces and direct their operations. The name of this great captain was, by divine authority, called Joshua, his original name was Hoshea; but when he was marked out for the office he afterwards sustained, it was changed into Joshua, by inserting one of the letters of the tetragram, or the incommunicable name, into his, to denote his partaking of the Spirit, and being invested with a portion of the authority of God.

The word *Joshua* imports a Saviour, and it is precisely the same in the Hebrew with that which was given to our Saviour, because he was to "save his people from their sins."

Under the conduct and command of this great captain, it was that the people of Israel were to expect victory,

and to him they were commanded to pay implicit obedience.

In leading the church militant, Jesus Christ, who is by name and by import the true Joshua, is appointed to the supreme command; and one of the most distinguishing characters under which he appears, is that of "the Captain of our salvation."* He said to Joshua, "as captain of the Lord's host am I come," and he is set up and proclaimed as the great antagonist of Satan, and of the powers of darkness; and it is only under his auspices, and in consequence of being strengthened and sustained by him, that we can indulge the hope of victory.

His "grace is sufficient for us; his strength is made perfect in our weakness."† "I can do all things," said St. Paul, "through Christ which strengtheneth me."‡ He is given as a "leader and commander to the people."§ He appeared to John in the Apocalypse, under the character of leader of the hosts of God. "And I saw heaven opened, and beheld a white horse; and he that sat thereon was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war: and the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations."‖

From him supernatural succours are derived to all who are enlisted under his banner. "All power is given to him in heaven," for the express purpose that he may give eternal life to all his followers; and if "the sun stood still in Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon," the whole course of nature is under the control of Christ, and all the operations of Providence are rendered subservient to the salvation and victory of his church. And christians are not dismayed at the powers and number of their adversaries, [so long] as they realize the character of their Leader, who is able to make them "more than conquerors."¶

* Heb. ii. 10. † 2 Cor. xii. 9. ‡ Phil. iv. 13.
§ Isaiah lv. 4. ‖ Rev. xix. 11—15. ¶ Rom. viii. 37.

As it is frequently remarked in the history of the conquest of Canaan, that the Lord fought for Israel, so it may be equally affirmed at present with respect to the church of God.

IV. The war with the Canaanites was a *bellum internecinum*—a war which was never to be terminated but in the destruction of the inhabitants. Having exhausted the patience of God, by their crimes and impieties, he was resolved to cut them off, and was pleased to employ his chosen people as the instruments in accomplishing the purposes of his justice. Hence they were strictly prohibited from making any league or truce with them, or seeking their peace or prosperity in any shape whatever. How often are they admonished with respect to the duty of declining affinity with them, and of contracting any social ties!

The character of this war was peculiar to itself, in its not being intended to recover violated rights, or to procure indemnity for past injuries, or security against future; but to vindicate the cause of God against the incorrigible, and to exhibit them as examples of divine retribution. Regard to the interests of those who engaged, was not the only or the prevailing principle of this war. In all these respects it exhibits a striking figure of the warfare the church of God is called to maintain with its spiritual enemies.

Like that waged with the Canaanites, no suitable measures are to be relaxed, no idea of concession or treaty admitted, no thought indulged of future amity and reconciliation. Our eyes must not pity, nor our hands spare; no tenderness must be indulged towards our spiritual enemies, no thought admitted but of pursuing them to destruction. We are to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts;"* to mortify, or in other words, put to death, our members that are in the earth, to endeavour that "the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth we shall not serve sin."†

As the children of Israel were forbidden to inquire in

* Gal. v. 24. † Rom. vi. 6.

what name the Canaanites had served their gods, and were not to take their name into their lips; so christians are to have no commuuion with the "unfruitful works of darkness," but to "reprove them," while "fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness, which is idolatry, are not to be so much as named amongst them. as becometh saints."* Every fibre of corruption is, if possible, to be extirpated, every part of the old man to be laid aside, "old things" universally renounced, and "all things to become new." Hostilities are never to cease till the enemy perishes out of the land.

V. Though God could easily have destroyed the Canaanites at once, though he could have crowned [his people] with immediate and decisive victory; yet he chose rather to do it, as he informs them by Moses, "by little and little."

He adopted this method to exercise more fully their faith and patience. "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the beasts of the field multiply against thee. By little and little will I drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land."†

For wise and mysterious ends, in like manner, he permits his church to attain but a gradual victory. It is by slow degrees, and by a long succession of conflicts, tha conquest is achieved; the force of the enemy is gradually weakened, and it is long ere the church is permitted completely to rest from its toils.

VI. To suffer our spiritual enemies to remain unsubdued, is uniformly productive of effects analogous to those which the Israelites were warned to expect from sparing the Canaanitish nations. "They shall be as pricks in your eyes, and goads in your sides, because you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you. Then it shall come to pass that those which ye let remain of them shall be as pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover, it shall come to pass, that

* Eph. v. 3. † Exod. xxiii. 29, 30.

I shall do unto you as I thought to do unto them."* It is one thing to suffer our enemies to remain unmolested, and another to commiserate their existence.

There are seasons when the christian, overdone with continual opposition, is ready to yield himself to the love of ease, and, relaxing in his opposition and vigilance, permits the enemy to gain some advantages; but if he hopes thereby to procure lasting tranquillity, he is greatly mistaken. There is that irreconcilable hatred between the principle of grace and the principle of corruption, between the new and the old man, Christ and Satan, that nothing is gained by an attempt to compromise their differences, or amicably to adjust their claims.

Our spiritual enemies are never capable of being softened by indulgence, of becoming neutral, much less of being converted into friends. They will be incessantly plotting our destruction, and watching for our unguarded moments, in order to catch every possible advantage of us; and the only safe way is [for us also] to be always on the watch, always distrustful of them, and hostile.

The people of Israel might have rid themselves much more completely of their enemies, had they availed themselves more diligently of their first advantages. Afterwards their enemies were suffered to remain for their trial.†

VII. The people were dismayed at the report of the spies; a lively resemblance to the conduct of too many who set out towards the heavenly Canaan, but in the contest suffer themselves to be dismayed.

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* Numb. xxxiii. 55, 56, &c. † Judges ii. 2, 3, 21—23.

XXI.

ON THE LAW OF GOD IN THE HEART.

Psalm xxxvii. 31.—*The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.*

The temporary prosperity of the wicked, has in every age afforded a trial to the faith and patience of the righteous. Often are they doomed to behold the contemner of God "flourishing like a green bay tree," abounding in sensual pleasures and luxurious enjoyments, and elated with pride, as though the world were made only for them; while such as fear his name are crushed under the rod of power, and subjected to the greatest privations and sufferings. Such is the scene of providence, a scene which appears to have given birth to the composition of this psalm, in which the impatience and discontent which such a spectacle is apt to occasion are corrected, the brevity of the worldly prosperity of the wicked is foretold, and the final happiness and triumph of the righteous asserted. The [righteous] are assured of the powerful protection of the Supreme Being, whose favour they at present enjoy; whose wisdom is continually, though invisibly, operating in securing their future good. "The Lord loveth judgement, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever."*

In opposition to the transient prosperity and the fugitive pleasures enjoyed by the wicked, the righteous is distinguished by the possession of permanent principles and unfading prospects. He is upheld by an invisible, but abiding power, and his character and conduct partake of the unchangeableness which belongs to his interior principles: "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide."

By "the law," in this passage, it is probable we are

* Psalm xxxvii. 28, 29.

to understand the word of God in general, with a particular reference to the preceptive part, in the same sense as it must undoubtedly be taken throughout the 119th Psalm. The preceptive part forms so essential a branch of every system of revelation, that it may with great propriety impart its peculiar name to the whole; agreeably to which even the gospel is denominated "the law of faith."*

These words present us, first, with a view of the internal principle which actuates a good man—"*the law of God is in his heart;*" next, with its effects on his external character and conduct,—"*none of his steps shall slide.*"

I. The inward principle which actuates him: "the law of God is in his heart." This implies,

1. An acquaintance with the law, considered as the standard of holiness, as the rule of action. A precept may be known, which is not obeyed, when it is not known. Nor will ignorance of the will of God excuse the disobedient; since such ignorance must be voluntary, the consequence of "loving darkness rather than light." The time is long past when such a pretence might have been urged with some plausibility. That period is elapsed when it was necessary for men "to feel after God," like persons who grope in search of an object in the dark. "The day hath dawned, the day-star hath arisen," the light of revelation shines with a brilliant effulgence, and the path of duty [is] made so plain, that the "wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."† When ignorance of the will of the Great Supreme arises from inattention, from carnal security, from a passive indifference whether he be pleased or displeased; instead of mitigating, it aggravates the guilt of disobedience. "They are a people," saith the prophet, "of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, he that formed them will show them no favour."‡ How different is it with the good man! "As the eyes of servants look unto their masters, and the

* Rom. iii. 27. † Isaiah xxxv. 8. ‡ Isaiah xxvii. 11.

eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so his eyes wait upon the Lord;" that he may attend to his directions and receive his orders. Conscious that he is made for God, he carefully explores his will, and he "meditates on his law day and night"

By a careful perusal of the sacred volume, by diligently weighing and pondering the precepts of revelation, he is constantly enlarging his conceptions of duty, and arriving nearer and nearer to a full and perfect comprehension of the spirit and import of its sacred injunctions. His fear of God is not taught by the commandments of men, stands not in human observances and will-worship, but in a solid acquaintance with the dictates of inspiration. Hence the service he presents is a reasonable one, the offspring of an enlightened faith, such as it is becoming man to offer, and God to accept.

By seriously applying the mind to the exhortations and injunctions of the sacred page, a good man arrives at a "quick understanding in the fear of the Lord," and his senses are "exercised to discern between good and evil."

2. The man of God is distinguished by an habitual [reference] to his mind and will. He is not merely acquainted with it as a branch of speculation, which serves to extend his knowledge, and to recommend itself to his understanding, while it seldom mingles with the ordinary current of his thoughts; it is not merely deposited in that department of his mind which seems a cabinet for the preservation of what is curious, rather than the reception of that which he has daily occasion to use. The precepts of God occupy much of his thoughts, and engage much of his attention. The knowledge of them is continually revived, the remembrance of them refreshed, by daily mental recollections, by reiterated acts of attention, such as it becomes us to exert towards the counsels and ordinances of the Great Eternal. It is thus, and thus only, that knowledge becomes practical and influential; that the light which first pervades the intellect, descends into the heart, and diffuses itself through all the faculties of the soul.

"And these words," said Moses, "which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."*

The original word is extremely expressive,—"thou shalt whet them on thy children," [or whet thy children upon them,] in allusion to the practice of giving the necessary edge to certain instruments, by continual friction with hard substances. Thus a good man whets the word of God on his own mind [so as to sharpen it] by successive acts of serious attention, [and thus acquire] an aptitude in applying it to its proper purpose. In the most busy and tumultuous scenes of life, it naturally occurs to his recollections, it instantaneously presents itself to his thoughts; while to the wicked the "judgements of the Lord are far above out of his sight," and it is with great difficulty that he raises his mind to such high and holy meditations, and, after all, it is a painful and short-lived effort.

3. The good man is impressed with a deep sense of the obligation of the law of God, accompanied with a sincere resolution of implicit and unreserved obedience. He is not only acquainted with the rules of duty, he does not merely make them the object of his serious and habitual attention: he accedes to the justice of their claims; his conscience is enlightened to discern their equity and their obligation; and he humbly but firmly resolves in the strength of divine grace, to yield a practical compliance. Far from arraigning the precepts of God as too strict, too extended, or too spiritual, he entirely acquiesces in their justice and propriety, and turns the edge of his censure and reproaches on himself only. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" He is perfectly satisfied that, however he may be "carnal, sold under sin," "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."† He blames himself

* Deut. vi. 6, 7. † Rom. vii. 12.

only, not the strictness of the precept; he laments the weakness and corruption of the flesh, not the purity of the divine command. Although he perfectly despairs of yielding such an obedience to its requisitions as shall justify him in the sight of God, he maintains a steady and conscientious respect to all his commandments. "Thy word," saith David, "is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgements."*

Holy resolutions are essential to a sincere obedience: they may become abortive by being framed in our own strength, and without "counting the cost;" but, notwithstanding, they are a necessary preparation to the conscientious performance of duty. Nothing is more certain than that real religion is a reasonable and voluntary service; he will never truly serve God who is not deliberately resolved to do so. Good resolutions bear the same relation to [upright conduct] as the seed bears to the fruit.

All this, however, of itself, is indeed sufficient to form a slave, not a child—to produce a constrained and reluctant obedience, not the cheerful homage of a heart flowing with gratitude and love. The understanding may be enlightened, conscience awakened, and the external conduct reputable; while the service of God is felt as an insupportable load, with difficulty sustained, though impossible to be shaken off.

Something more is requisite to render religion a delight, to convert wisdom's ways into "ways of pleasantness," and her paths into "paths of peace."

4. To put the finishing stroke, then, to the character of a good man, let me add, once more, that his heart is inspired with a love to the law of God after "the inner man." Considered as a transcript of the divine perfections, as an expression of [God's] immaculate holiness, as the instrument of his sanctification, it is the object of his devoted attachment. The dispositions which it enforces are wrought into his heart; the inward bias of

* Psalm cxix. 105, 106.

his mind is directed towards the holiness which it prescribes; and so intense is his approbation of all its requisitions, that the least alteration in it would give him pain. He longs, not to have the standard of duty reduced to his level, but to have his own heart raised to its elevation. He would not wish for a law which connived at impurity, which commanded any thing short of moral perfection. [Its] immaculate holiness, to him, forms its principal attraction.

It is also entitled to our warmest attachment, on account of its beneficial tendency; it is adapted, in the highest degree, to correct every moral irregularity, and to diffuse order and happiness throughout the whole creation. In proportion as it is obeyed, it never fails to insure the "peaceable fruits of righteousness."

Hence those passionate expressions of attachment to the holy precepts of God, which abound in the writings of David, and particularly in the 119th Psalm. "O how love I thy law!" "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgements at all times." "I will speak of thy testimonies before kings, and will not be ashamed: and I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate on thy statutes."

Its precepts may often do violence to the inclinations of flesh and blood, may often urge to laborious duties and painful sacrifices; sinful pleasures may be [desired], which unsanctified natures find as difficult to part with, as to "cut off a right hand, or to pluck out a right eye;" but still the manifest equity of its requisitions, and their evident subserviency to our best, our eternal interest, is such that they are cordially approved. A congeniality of mind with the tenor of the divine precepts is experienced; whence arises a practical compliance, not so much the fruit of necessity, as the effect of inward vital principle. Herein is fulfilled the gracious declaration of the new covenant—"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in

their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."* This is the great work of the Spirit on the souls of the faithful, the seal of God on the heart of his servants, and the distinguishing feature in the character of his children. Their love to the law produces grief at seeing it violated. "Horror hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law."†

5. In a good man this attachment to the law of God, and to the rules of duty, is progressive, and, with every accession of religious experience, becomes more vigorous and confirmed. The farther he advances in his christian course, the more deeply he is convinced that his prosperity is inseparably allied to obedience, that his spiritual enjoyments rise or fall in proportion as he walks more or less closely with his God. "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee."‡

"Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way which thou shouldest go. O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."§

II. Its effects on the character and conduct: "none of his steps shall slide." His steps shall not fatally slide; he shall maintain a uniform and consistent deportment.

1. The violence of temptation shall not overpower him.

2. The suddenness of it shall not surprise him.

3. The deceitfulness of it shall not seduce him.

4. The example of the multitude shall not prevail.

* Jer. xxxi. 33. † Psalm cxix. 53.
‡ Psalm lxxxi. 13, 14, 16. § Isa. xlviii. 17, 18.

XXII.

ON PRAYER FOR THE INCREASE OF FAITH.

Luke xvii. 5.—*And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.*

We have here an example of prayer addressed to Christ; which implies an acknowledgement of his divinity, since it is a received principle of scripture that God only is the proper object of prayer.

It is the more deserving of our attention on account of its being a prayer for a spiritual blessing, and that a blessing of prime importance; nor could it, with any propriety, be presented to one who was not conceived to have immediate access to the mind. However wavering or confused the apprehension the apostles entertained of Christ's personal dignity might be, during the continuance of his ministry on earth, it seems evident, from this instance, that there were seasons when they felt a lively conviction of his divinity, under which they ascribed to him a sovereign power over the heart.

From the reply which our Saviour makes to this petition, it is probable it more immediately respected that faith of miracles with which the apostles were, in some measure, endued, and which was greatly strengthened and enlarged after the day of Pentecost. The weakness of that faith they had, on some occasions, experienced, when persons afflicted with maladies were brought to them, and they were not able to effect their cure.* A circumstance of this nature, it is possible, had recently occurred, which gave rise to this request.

Whatever particular species of faith might be designed in the words of the apostle, now before us, we shall beg leave to consider faith, in the present discourse, in its more ordinary acceptation, in which it denotes a persuasion of divine truth, founded on the testimony, and produced by the Spirit, of God.

* Luke ix. 40.

The faith of which we shall speak is that cordial assent to the testimony of God, which distinguishes all regenerate persons, and which is defined by St. Paul, "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* Faith, in the New Testament, is applied solely to the exercise of the mind on the divine testimony. It denotes a reliance on the veracity and faithfulness of God; his veracity respecting the truth of what he has affirmed, his faithfulness in the accomplishment of what he has promised. Hence it differs from sense and reason. Of the objects of the former we gain a knowledge by immediate experience, by their direct impressions on the bodily organs; of those which fall within the province of the latter, we arrive at a conviction, by a process of argument more or less simple. Faith, on the contrary, is a reliance on the truth of what God has declared, simply because he has declared it. It implies a revelation of his mind and will: and the principle on which it founds the assurance of whatever it embraces is this, the Supreme Being can neither deceive his creatures, nor be deceived. It converses with supernatural verities, that is, with truths which are not capable of being ascertained by sense, or demonstrated by reason.

In our present discourse we shall confine ourselves to two observations.

I. That genuine faith admits of degrees.

II. That an increase of faith is, on every account highly desirable.

I. Where faith is genuine and sincere, it is yet susceptible of different degrees. Considered with respect to the number of the truths embraced, it is obvious, at first sight, that the faith of one christian may be far more extensive than that of another. Though every real christian embraces the whole revelation of God, and has, consequently, an implicit confidence in all the declarations contained in it, yet the knowledge of one may extend to many more particulars than that of another: a more accurate acquaintance with the Scriptures may

* Heb. xi. 1.

bring before the view some truths of which the other entertains no conception. The religious belief of one may be confined to first principles, while that of another includes also the higher and more refined mysteries of christianity. Considered in this light, none can doubt of the possibility of an increase of faith; though, strictly speaking, such an enlargement of the view may be more properly denominated an increase of knowledge.

An increase of faith respects more immediately, farther developement of the principle itself, a greater force of persuasion, a more unshaken confidence in revealed truth, accompanied with a more uncontrolled ascendency of it over the heart. The strength of Abraham's faith is described, not as consisting in the extent of the truths it embraced, but in the force and vigour of his persuasion of the divine promises. It is opposed to his "staggering through unbelief." A persuasion of the same divine truths, even when it is cordial and sincere, may admit of augmentation. The power and grace of the Redeemer, for example, by which, "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him,"* are cordially believed by all christians, but they are apprehended with different measures of clearness and force: with some they are sufficient to embolden them to venture upon him with trembling hope; with others they produce the full assurance of faith, accompanied with "joy unspeakable and full of glory."† The transcendent love of the Redeemer, in dying for us, is truly apprehended, and sincerely believed, by all true christians; but the views which they entertain of it are very different in depth and impression. As the same object may be seen under different lights, so the same truths may be contemplated with distinct degrees of evidence and brightness. To "perfect that which is lacking in your faith."‡ "Your faith groweth exceedingly."§ "But having hope, when your faith is increased."||

By the nature of things, the light of faith must ever

* Heb. vii. 25. † 1 Pet. i. 8. ‡ 1 Thess. iii. 10.
§ 2 Thess. i. 3. || 2 Cor. x. 15.

be inferior to that of vision; it can never fully reach in its power over the heart, the perfection of sight, and, consequently, will never make us equally happy or holy with those who "see as they are seen, and know as they are known." There is a limit to which it can never reach, but it may make nearer and nearer approaches to it. These things, on which the faith of a christian is exercised, may be considered as twofold; consisting either of objects revealed, which have a present subsistence, or promises of future good. The character and perfections of the blessed God, the office and work of the Redeemer, the dignity of his person, the efficacy of his blood, and the prevalence of his intercession, belong to the former. The light of faith makes this known to us: and this light is progressive, and by it we may attain to still higher and more transforming views of God and the Redeemer.*

XXIII.

SECOND DISCOURSE, ON PRAYER FOR THE INCREASE OF FAITH.

Luke xvii. 5.—*Lord, increase our faith.*

The advantages resulting from an increase of faith.

I. As they respect ourselves.

II. As they regard the Supreme Being.

I. As they respect ourselves. It will have powerful influence in increasing our religious enjoyments. One grand design of christianity is to make mankind happy by diminishing that portion of vexation of spirit which cleaves to all earthly things. "These things have I spoken unto you," said our blessed Lord, "that your joy might be full."† But the degree of this joy will be proportioned to the measure of our faith.

1. An increase of faith will effectually deliver us from

* This and the following sermon were preached in June, 1810.
† John xv. 11.

distressing doubts respecting our state. As light makes all other things manifest, so it makes itself. While faith is "like to a grain of mustard seed,"* it may be difficult to be discerned; but, when it becomes more matured, it will be easily perceivable.

2. The things of God are so transcendently excellent and glorious, that the more lively our apprehension of them, the more happy we shall necessarily be. The more we see of God in Christ, the more we shall be conscious of a surpassing beauty in those objects, that will eclipse the whole world in our view. The all-sufficiency and unchangeableness, the goodness, holiness, and truth of the Great Eternal, viewed by faith, will fill the mind with the most exalted satisfaction. The glory of the visible heavens and of the earth, is nothing more than the reflection, or rather the shadow, of this glory. If the contemplation of created truth and goodness, developed in the actions of man, affords so high a satisfaction; if it is sufficient in its brightest display, to excite rapture; how much more [will the mind be] fired in meditating by faith on the original, unchanging, and eternal truth and goodness! If to trace the counsels of princes, [to observe] the masterly strokes of wisdom and address, evinced in the management of the concerns of earthly kingdoms [gives pleasure,] how much more ravishing to have laid open to our view the counsels of the King of kings; to be allowed to behold the deep things of God; the contrivance of that covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure; the thoughts of his heart, which endure to all generations! How delightful to see the footsteps of divine grace in ancient times, the gradual preparations for the coming of Christ, the types and shadows of the law preparing the way for preaching the cross, and the preaching of the cross succeeded by the vision of eternal glory! If to contemplate some stupendous work of God fills the mind with admiration and delight, how much more to dwell by faith on the mediation of Him who is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express

* Matt. xiii. 31.

image of his person;"* assuming our nature, carrying our sins up with him to the cross, rising from the dead, sitting at the right hand of God, ever living to make intercession, diffusing his Spirit, and scattering his graces, among the children of men. Who that knows any thing of such an object, can be content without wishing to know more of him? Who will not be disposed to look on all things else as dross and dung when compared to such an object?

To feel the steady illumination of faith, is to dwell in a calm and holy light; and if it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the natural light, how much more to behold this light of God, which sheds an incomparably sweeter ray; which reveals his face, brings near his love, and lays open the prospects of eternity! Guided by this light, you will be conducted to the abode of the celestial city, when a view will be opened into paradise, and you will hear, with John, "the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of harpers harping with their harps, and crying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."†

1. An increase of faith will deliver us from the perplexity which springs from a state of mind unsettled in religion.

2. It will have an extensive influence on our sanctification.

(1.) The joys of faith will diminish your sensibility of the pleasures of sin. The pure and certain satisfaction, which springs from spiritual views, will indispose you to relish the polluted gratifications of sense; the satisfaction to be derived from earthly pleasures will appear too light and airy, too transitory and inconstant, to bear a comparison with those richer enjoyments to which the soul has access by faith.

(2.) As the gospel supplies the strongest motives to holiness, so faith brings the heart into contact with those motives.

* Heb. i. 3. † Rev. xiv. 2; v. 13.

(3.) So important is an increase of faith to an advancement in the divine life, that all the graces of the christian are represented as so many fruits of faith, neither any farther acceptable to God than as they sprung from this principle. In their extent, perfection, and variety, they are nothing more than the genuine practice of a lively faith: "Abide in me, and let my words abide in you."* Faith is a prolific grace, it produces and maintains every other; it "works by love;"† "it purifies the heart."‡

II. In its aspect towards God. It is the grand instrument of glorifying him.

In its essential exercises, apart from its external effects it is eminently adapted to glorify God. It renders to him the glory due unto his name. It rests on him as the Eternal Truth, as the Rock of Ages; "Abraham being strong in faith, gave glory to God."§

Directions for increasing Faith.

I. Earnest and humble prayer: "Lord, increase our faith." Fall at the footstool of the cross, crying, with him in the gospel, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief."||

II. Frequent and devout converse with the object of it.

III. Watchfulness against the influence of those objects which have a fatal tendency to eclipse its light, to obstruct its operations, and impair its effects; namely, sensual pleasure; eager pursuit of the world; intimate converse with men of the world.

* John xv. 7. † Gal. v. 6. ‡ 1 John iii. 3. § Rom. iv. 20. || Mark ix. 24.

XXIV.

ON WISDOM.

James i. 5.—*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.**

Of all the gifts which God is wont to dispense to the children of men, the most valuable is wisdom. Without this, the advantages we derive from every other are precarious and transitory, and are often more than overbalanced by the evils which result from their abuse. Wisdom is of incomparable value, as it instructs us how to use every other good; how to turn it to the best account, and make it most subservient to the true end of our being. The Scriptures extol the excellence of wisdom in the highest terms:—"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than pure gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her."†

Wisdom is to be distinguished from knowledge; to which it bears an affinity, but ought not to be confounded with it. There may be a large compass of knowledge acquired, the fruit of extensive observation and reading, accompanied with a quick perception and a capacious memory, where there is very little wisdom. A wretched misconduct may appear at the same [time], a series of imprudences, thoughtless prodigality, or intemperance, sufficient to invalidate the least pretension to wisdom. There are far more knowing than wise men. Talents of the highest order, and such as are calculated to command universal admiration, may exist apart from wisdom. Though wisdom necessarily presupposes knowledge, and it is impossible to exercise it in things of which we are ignorant, yet it ought to be something more practical, or rather more comprehensive: it ever bears a relation to

* Preached in June 1811.

† Prov. iii. 13–15.

the end; and, in proportion as it is perfect, to the highest and last end the agent can be supposed to have in view. It first judges of the end fittest to be pursued, and next determines what are the most fitting and suitable means of accomplishing it.

Every other quality besides is subordinate and inferior to wisdom, in the same sense as the mason who lays the bricks and stones in a building is inferior to the architect who drew the plan and superintends the work. The former executes only what the latter contrives and directs. Now, it is the prerogative of wisdom to preside over every inferior principle, to regulate the exercise of every power, and limit the indulgence of every appetite, as shall best conduce to one great end. It being the province of wisdom to preside, it sits as umpire on every difficulty, and so gives the final direction and control to all the powers of our nature. Hence it is entitled to be considered as the top and summit of perfection. It belongs to wisdom to determine when to act, and when to cease; when to reveal, and when to conceal a matter; when to speak, and when to keep silence; when to give, and when to receive; in short, to regulate the measure of all things, as well as to determine the end, and provide the means of obtaining the end, pursued in every deliberate course of action.

Every particular faculty or skill besides needs to derive direction from this; they are all quite incapable of directing themselves. The art of navigation, for instance, will teach us to steer a ship across the ocean, but it will never teach us on what occasions it is proper to take a voyage. The art of war will instruct us how to marshal an army, or to fight a battle, to the greatest advantage; but you must learn from a higher school when it is fitting, just, and proper, to wage war or to make peace. The art of the husbandman is to sow and bring to maturity the precious fruits of the earth; it belongs to another skill to regulate their consumption by a regard to our health, fortune, and other circumstances.

In short, there is no faculty we can exert, no species of skill we can apply, but requires a superintending

hand; but looks up, as it were, to some higher principle, as a maid to her mistress, for direction: and this universal superintendent is wisdom.*

To carry our ideas of it as far as possible, the wise man traces it up to its fountain, and contemplates it as it subsists in the breast of Deity. "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew."†

But though we have taken occasion to speak thus far of wisdom in general, it is doubtful whether we are to take the word in that extension in the passage before us. If we turn to the context, we shall find St. James describing the happy fruits which result from a right temper under affliction and persecution. This epistle, as well as the two epistles of Peter, are supposed to have been addressed to the Jews under circumstances of persecution, St. James had exhorted christians to count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of their faith worketh patience. "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." He then adds, "If any of you lack wisdom," (that is, the wisdom necessary to suffer right, the wisdom included in a right and becoming temper under persecutions and trials,) "let him ask of God."

In this view, the wisdom here mentioned may be considered as including two things.

I. A knowledge of duty.

* The admirers of Cowper will, on reading the above, be naturally reminded of his graphic contrast of Knowledge and Wisdom, in the sixth book of the Task.

"Knowledge and Wisdom, far from being one,
Have ofttimes no connexion. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Knowledge, a rude unprofitable mass,
The mere materials with which wisdom builds,
Till smooth'd, and squar'd, and fitted to its place,
Does but encumber whom it seems to enrich.
Knowledge is proud that he has learnt so much;
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more."—Ed.

† Prov. iii. 19, 20.

A clear and just conception of what was duty, was not always easily attained. A season of persecution for righteousness' sake would naturally be productive, in many cases, of great difficulty in determining how to act.

"When they persecute you in one city," said our Lord, "flee ye to another." But what is the degree of danger, what the [serious advance] of the approaching storm, that will exempt flight from the charge of pusillanimity? What the just limits betwixt a temporizing policy and imprudent rashness? There is, doubtless, a just limit betwixt wantonly exposing ourselves to danger, and a cowardly shrinking from it; betwixt that selfish timidity which will sacrifice truth to safety, and that undistinguishing fearlessness which will prompt us "to cast pearls before swine," though it be morally certain "they will turn again and rend us."

A nice discernment of the true path of duty on such occasions can only be acquired by divine teaching.

II. The wisdom necessary in such circumstances includes especially a right temper of mind towards God and our fellow-creatures.

1. Towards God. This temper very much consists in a humble acquiescence in his dispensations, in a readiness to suffer under his hand, and in his cause. It is one thing to suffer under the hand of God inevitable calamities; and another to suffer with a cheerful resignation, with a full and unreserved acquiescence in the divine disposals, mixing adoring thoughts of the wisdom of his proceedings and the equity of his dispensations, saying, from the heart, with our blessed Lord, "Not my will, but thine be done;" "Father, glorify thy name." In this, and in every other instance, the conduct of our Lord furnishes us with a perfect example of that wisdom it is our duty to implore of God. The wisdom that bows the mind to submission, "stays it upon God," and fills it with meekness and compassion, while we "commit ourselves to him as to a faithful Creator," is of no ordinary kind—can be procured only from one quarter.

2. This includes a proper temper towards our fellow-

creatures; and particularly towards the authors of our sufferings. Nature, left to itself, is apt to break out into resentment, to feel exasperated; and the more in proportion as the treatment we meet with is unquestionably unreasonable and unjust.

The first suggestion of nature in such circumstances, is, "to render evil for evil," to wish to be revenged, and to retaliate the usage we have sustained. Very different is the wisdom that is from above: which teaches, "if our enemy be hungry, to feed him; if thirsty, to give him drink, and thus to heap coals of fire upon his head:" that, instead of being "overcome of evil, we may overcome evil with good,"* To look upon men, however injurious, as instruments in the hand of the just and holy God; and to overlook the former, in an attention to the latter, is a high attainment of spiritual wisdom; like David, who when he was cursed and insulted by Shimei, said, "Let him alone, for the Lord hath bidden him; it may be that the Lord may requite me good for his cursing this day."†

While we feel the effects of their malice, to forgive it freely and sincerely, and to pray with sincerity that it may not be laid to their charge,—not to permit the conduct of the enemy to induce a forgetfulness of what belongs to him as a creature of God, and a partaker of the same nature,—is a piece of wisdom that is truly godlike. While we are assisted by divine grace to bear persecutions and afflictions in a right spirit, the gracious purpose of God in permitting them, advances towards its completion; the process goes on without disturbance; the sanctifying tendency of it continues unchecked; patience has its perfect work, in order to our being "perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Repining and impatience tend eminently to frustrate the [merciful] intentions of Providence in our affliction; while the composure of a well-regulated mind—of a mind stayed upon God, gives them an opportunity of working their full effect. And, on this account, a suitable temper in

* Rom. xii. 20, 21.

† 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 12.

a season of persecution and trial may justly be denominated an important branch of wisdom. Though the apostle had, in enjoining the duty before us, an especial view to the case of persecution, yet this is by no means the only case to which the advice is applicable. The occasions in which we lack wisdom are very numerous: in each of them it will behove us to ask it of God.

We are continually liable to difficulties and sorrows, from which nothing but a superior skill to our own can extricate us: "The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."* Are we at a loss, in present circumstances, to descry the path of duty and safety, when our way appears to be hedged in on every side; is darkness set in our paths, and we know not how to proceed?—"Let us ask wisdom of God." Do we feel ourselves habitually overpowered by the force of temptation; do we feel evil present with us, or are we in danger of being carried [along] by the [violence] of our sensual appetites, against which we have hitherto struggled in vain? [let us ask wisdom of God.]

Enforce the exhortation of seeking it of God in the following considerations:—

I. As it is of indispensable necessity, so it is in vain to seek it elsewhere.

II. It resides in him in its utmost perfection.

III. He is willing to communicate: "For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous."† "Giveth liberally," ἁπλῶς, with a liberal mind, bountifully.

"The caution,—"nothing doubting."

* Jer. x. 23. † Prov. ii. 6. 7.

XXV.

ON ENGAGEDNESS OF HEART IN APPROACHING UNTO GOD.

JEREMIAH xxx. 21.—*For who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.*

IN this chapter is contained an illustrious prophecy of the restoration of the ancient Israelites to their own land: first, from their captivity in Babylon, whither a part of the nation were already, and the remainder were shortly to be removed; next, from their long captivity and dispersion through all the countries of the earth, which has now subsisted for nearly eighteen hundred years. As a standing record of the faithfulness of God to his promises, as well as his infallible foreknowledge of all events, the prophet is commanded to commit to writing all the words which God had spoken to him during the whole time he had exercised the prophetic office.

Those who had presumed to speak in the name of the Lord, without being commissioned, had flattered the [Jews] with the assurances that the residue of the people should not be carried into Babylon, and that the part of the nation which were already sent thither should speedily be restored to their native country. In opposition to these false suggestions, Jeremiah was commanded to send a message to the captives in Babylon, saying, "Build ye houses in Babylon, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons."* In that message he delivered the famous prediction respecting the precise time of the duration of their captivity, which he limits to seventy years, and the study of which enabled Daniel to perceive its approaching termination. "In the first year of his reign (*i. e.* of Darius) I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the destruction of Jerusalem."†

* Jer. xxix. 5, 6.

† Dan. ix. 2.

As a part of the distinguishing favours which God said he had in reserve for the people, he promises that at their restoration the oppression of a foreign yoke should be broken, and they should be again ruled by princes of their own race, agreeable to the language of Isaiah respecting the same event; when the people shall first be purified and reformed by divine chastisement, and, afterwards, reinstated in a happy and prosperous condition. "And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgement, and her converts with righteousness."* It is not only foretold that a native governor should be set over the house of Israel, but that he should be distinguished for his piety—"The Lord will cause him to draw nigh unto him."

The words of the text may be considered in three points of view.

I. As descriptive of the character of Zerubbabel, they were accomplished in the restoration of the Jews, after the seventy years' captivity, when a governor was appointed over them, named Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the great grandson of Jehoiachim. He was a person eminently devoted to God, who exerted himself with much zeal in rebuilding the altar and the temple, and establishing the worship of God. Under his auspices, the services of the sanctuary were renewed, after a cessation of seventy years. The feast of tabernacles was established in the seventh month. Masons and builders were hired from Sidon to assist in erecting the temple, the foundation of which was laid amidst confused expressions of joy and lamentation: joy on the part of the young men at witnessing the house of God rising up from its ruins; and lamentation on the part of the old, who had beheld the superior glory of the former.†

When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, envy-

* Isa. i. 25—27. † See Ezra iii. 11—13.

ing their prosperity, hired counsellors against them, and procured an order from the king of Persia to put a stop to the work, it was of necessity suspended for a while; but he lost no time in resuming it at the first opportunity, till it was completed in the sixth year of Darius Hystaspes. A feast of dedication was kept on this joyful occasion, and afterwards the feast of the passover was celebrated on the fourteenth of the first month, with great joy, as Ezra observes: "The Lord made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."*

He, and Joshua the high-priest, were represented in the visions of Zechariah, as the two candlesticks supplied through pipes from olive trees, to indicate the plenitude of that juice with which they were endued, which is thus explained by the angel:—"Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth."† The difficulties attending the work, which were very great in themselves, were extremely heightened by the malice and opposition of the enemies of God, particularly of the Samaritans; but the strength and fortitude with which he was endowed from on high enabled him to surmount them. "Who art thou, O great mountain?" said the prophet; "before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands also shall finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you."‡

II. The words of the text admit of being applied, with the greatest propriety, to the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophecy contained in the thirtieth and thirty-first chapters looks forward to gospel times, and has an ultimate respect to the final restoration of the Jews, and their conversion to the Messiah, of whom Zerubbabel was an illustrious type. The prophet was wont, in connexion with the assurances of the divine favour to the

* Ezra vi. 22. † Zech. iv. 14. ‡ Zech. iv. 7—9.

Israelites, in restoring their temple after the captivity, to mix predictions of the coming of the Messiah :—"Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."*

The prophet foreseeing the coming of the Messiah, and descrying his character, spake with an air of surprise: "And who is he that has engaged his heart to approach unto God?" None ever approached unto God so nearly, or under the same character as he did. He, considered as man, was taken into an intimate personal union with the Deity, so as to become Immanuel, or "God with us;"† and he approached to God, in the office of a Mediator, to make peace between the offended Majesty of Heaven and his sinful creatures. He came, like Aaron, with incense, betwixt the living and the dead, to stay the plague, and arrest divine vengeance in its career. He approached unto God in our behalf, not with the trembling diffidence of a sinful mortal, who is conscious of his own danger and demerits, but with the holy, becoming boldness of a son to a father. He interposed with precious blood; and on the ground of the stipulations which intervene between him and the Father, claims his church as his purchase, and asserts his authority to save them "with an everlasting salvation:" "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom."‡ He made his approach to God by a vicarious sacrifice and spotless obedience, by enduring the awful penalty denounced on transgressors; and by magnifying the law made it honourable.

His heart was also ineffably engaged in this work. None ever exhibited such a concern for the divine honour, such a zeal for the divine interests, as was exemplified by our blessed Lord. "Sacrifice and offering

* Zech. vi. 12, 13. † Isaiah vii. 14. ‡ Job xxxiii. 24.

thou didst not desire: in burnt-offering and sin-offering thou hadst no pleasure. Then I said, To do thy will, O God, I come; thy law is within my heart."*

Nor was he deterred by the greatest discouragements, nor dismayed by the greatest opposition, nor by the certain prospect of the most dismal sufferings, so as to desist from persevering in his undertaking till it was completed. He did not "fail, nor was discouraged, till he had set judgement in the earth."

Animated by the joy that was set before him, "he endured the cross, despising the shame."

If we look through all the scenes and passages of his life, we shall find him incessantly engaged in his Father's business, with an utter contempt of the world, and a perfect absorption of mind in the great and holy objects he came to accomplish. He never for a moment lost sight of the ends of his mission, nor ever suffered his attention to be diverted from them by the love of ease, the fascination of pleasure, or the terrors of death. His disciples, who were the daily witnesses of his actions, were compelled to apply to him a remarkable expression in the prophetic part of the Psalms—"The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."†

III. We may consider the passage before us as highly expressive of the true manner in which the service of God must be undertaken, if we would render it acceptable to him, or useful to ourselves.

Among the heathen, it was usual to form a conjecture of the good or ill success of application to their deities, from the state in which the entrails of the victim were found; and nothing was considered as a more fatal omen than its *wanting a heart.* Their worship, we are well aware, was folly and delusion; but in this instance it may serve to illustrate the subject before us, which is, the absolute necessity of the heart being engaged in religion.

By the heart, the Scriptures generally intend the innermost and the noblest powers of the mind, in opposi-

* Psalm xl. 6—8. † Psalm lxix. 9.

tion to external actions of the body. It denotes deliberate choice, understanding, and feeling, as distinguished from the semblance of devotion, consisting in a compliance with its visible forms and regulations. As the heart has usually (whether justly or not it is not necessary to inquire) been looked upon as the seat of feeling, in like manner as the brain has been supposed to be the chief organ of thought, it has been, by an easy metaphor, employed to denote that faculty of the soul by which we perceive what appears,desirable, and cleave to what affords us satisfaction, and taste the delight which certain objects are adapted to afford. This is a most essential part of religion ; here is its proper seat.

1. It implies a preparation of heart for religious duties. Ezra "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it," to disengage his mind from vain imaginations, from worldly thoughts, from every thing, in short, foreign to the spirit of religion. By a diligent perusal of a portion of the word of God, we are prepared to approach him ; by hearing him when he speaks to us, we are fitted to speak to him.

He who rushes into the presence of the Most High without solemn deliberation, without reflecting on the weighty and serious nature of such an undertaking, can with little propriety be said to have "engaged his heart."

2. It includes the exercise of suitable affections in the services of religion, the being susceptible of such sentiments and dispositions as are correspondent to the universal object of worship, as well as to the diversified circumstances in which [we are placed.] Love, reverence, and trust, a profound sense of our own meanness and pollution, belong universally to every approach to God. While these dispositions in truly pious souls, will receive a colour and complexion from their peculiar condition,---according as it is a condition of joy or sorrow, of sensible consolation or of desertion, is depressed with a consciousness of guilt or exhilirated with a sense of pardon,---the soul sometimes, with little reflection on its own state, will be taken up with adoring views of the

divine glory, delightfully losing itself in the vivid contemplation of the great All in All. At other times it will be occupied with an affecting view of the conduct of God towards it in providence and grace. "We thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple."* There are seasons again, when, under the burdens of guilt and distress, it will be incessantly stirring itself up to take hold upon God. "Have mercy upon me, O Lord: my soul is bowed down within me; my wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness."†

In such circumstances the pious soul will resemble Jacob, who wrestled with the angel, wept, and made supplication. In all these various exercises, the heart will be engaged in approaching to God: the heart will be mingled with it, as the expression signifies.

3. It includes constancy and unshaken firmness, stedfastness of resolution to cleave to God. "I have sworn," says David, "and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgements. I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end."

(Contrast this with the conduct of the Children of Israel at the Red Sea, and with Saul.)

XXVI.

ON FAMILY WORSHIP.

1 Chron. xvi. 43.—*And all the people departed every man to his house: and David returned to bless his house.*

Public exercises of religion, when properly conducted, have a happy tendency to prepare the mind for those of a more private nature. When the soul is elevated and the heart softened by the feelings which public worship is calculated to inspire, we are prepared to address the

* Psalm xlviii. 9. † Psalm vi. 2. xxxviii. 5, 6.

throne of grace with peculiar advantage; we are disposed to enter with a proper relish on such a duty, and thus "go from strength to strength." David, at the time to which this passage refers, had been assisting at a great and joyful solemnity, that of bringing the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom, where it had abode three months, to the place which he had prepared for it. The joy which David felt on this interestiug occasion was very rapturous. He conducted it to Jerusalem, and set it in the midst of the tent he had pitched for it. He offered, as a testimony of his zeal and devotion, burnt offerings and sacrifices to God, and then closed the solemnity.

We need be at no loss to ascertain the import of this expression. It undoubtedly signifies his imploring the blessing of God upon his people by prayer and supplication. Under the ancient law, God was pleased to appoint a form in which Aaron, the high-priest, was commanded to bless the people. "On this wise ye shall bless the Children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."*

This instructs us how to understand what is meant by "David's returning to bless his house;" it was to present them to God in prayer, and entreat his blessing upon them.

I shall take occasion from these words to urge upon you the duty of family prayer; a duty, I fear, too much neglected amongst us, though it is one of high importance and indispensable obligation. In bringing this subject before you, I shall, first, attempt to show the solid reasons on which it is founded; and, secondly, endeavour, with the blessing of God, to suggest a few hints respecting the best method of performing it.

I. The passage before us invites us to consider it is a practice by which good men have been distinguished in every age.

* Numb. vi. 23—26.

It pleads the sanction of the highest example. It was exemplified, we see, in the conduct of David, "the sweet Psalmist of Israel," "the men after God's own heart;" a great and victorious prince, who did not suppose the cares of royalty a sufficient reason for neglecting it. In the various removals of Abraham from place to place, we find that wherever he came to sojourn he built an altar, to call upon the name of the Lord: an altar at which there is the greatest reason to believe he was wont to assemble his family, and to present his addresses on their, as well as his own, behalf. We know, from the testimony of scripture, that he was eminently conspicuous for the care he took of the religious instruction of his household. This part of his character is attested in the following emphatic manner: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."*

But wherein, we may safely ask, was this solicitude for the spiritual welfare of his household displayed, if he never bowed the knee with them in prayer; never exemplified before their eyes so important a duty as that of devout supplication to the Almighty?

In the history of Isaac we read of his building an altar at Beersheba, and calling upon the name of the Lord. Such also was the custom of Jacob at the different places where he fixed his habitation. On one of these occasions we find him thus addressing his household: "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."†

Thus ancient is the practice on which we are now insisting. It appears to have formed a prominent part of the religion of patriarchal times, and it has subsisted in every period of the christian church.

* Gen. xviii. 19. † Gen. xxxv. 2, 3.

In later ages, who among the devoted servants of Christ can be mentioned, that have neglected it? The pious reformers, the venerable founders of the Established Church of England, we know, conscientiously practised and earnestly enforced it; and so did our pious forefathers among the nonconformists. This was a branch of their conduct for which they incurred the ridicule of a careless and ungodly world; and in their days it was ever recognized as an inseparable appendage of true piety. They would have required no further proof of the absence of the fear of God in a family than the want of a domestic altar, at which its members might call on the name of the Lord.

2. Family prayer is a natural and necessary acknowledgement of the dependence of families upon God, and of the innumerable obligations they are under to his goodness. The union of mankind in families is ascribed to God, and is a distinguished [mark] of his loving-kindness. "God setteth the solitary in families."* "He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children."† The ties of domestic society are of his forming: the birth and preservation of children are eminent instances of his favour and beneficence. It is surely incumbent on families, then, to acknowledge him in their domestic relation.

Every family is a separate community, placed under one head, and governed by laws independent of foreign control. This sort of society is the root and origin of every other; and as it is the most ancient, so it is bound together by ties [the most] tender and sacred. Every other social bond in which men are united is loose and incidental, compared to that which unites the members of the same family.

On what, let me ask, does the obligation of social worship rest? Is it not in the social nature by which man is distinguished? It is because we are destined to live in society, and are bound together by mutual wants and sympathies, that it becomes a duty to worship the

* Psalm lxviii. 6. † Psalm cxiii. 9.

Creator in a social manner. Man being essentially a social creature, his religion takes the forms of his nature, and becomes social.

Supposing the justice of these observations to be admitted, they conclude with the greatest force in favour of the obligation of family worship. Does the duty of social worship result from man's being placed in society? Here is the closest and most intimate society. Is it right that mercies received in common shall be publicly acknowledged; that the interposition of divine goodness we in common want should be implored in company with each other? Here is a perfect identity of wants and necessities; a closer conjunction of interests than can possibly subsist in any other situation. In an affectionate and well-ordered family, that quick sympathy is felt which pervades the members of the body: if one member suffer, all suffer with it; or if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

No earthly blessing can befall the head of a family, in which its members do not share the benefit; no calamity can befall him, without spreading sadness and distress through the household. Whatever is suffered, or whatever is enjoyed, extends its influence through the whole circle. Whoever, consequently, reflects on the true foundation of social worship, must perceive that the arguments which evince its propriety, apply to the worship of families with still greater cogency, in proportion as the ties of domestic union are more close and intimate than all others. It is hardly possible to conceive of two individuals, who are actuated by a principle of true religion, passing years together under the same roof, without uniting in their addresses to a throne of grace. We feel a persuasion, that two such individuals, though nowise related to each other, will be led to signalize their union by acts of social piety, and that as they must often "hold sweet counsel together," so they will frequently be disposed to pour out their united supplications to God.

How much more may this be expected to take place betwixt those who are united in the close relation of

husbands and wives, parents and children! It most assuredly will, unless that ingredient in the character be wanting, which in the former instance was supposed,—a principle of real piety. Thus we perceive that family religion is the natural result of the social nature of man, when sanctified by divine grace; that it is, in truth, a most important branch of social religion. Viewed in that light, it is clearly comprehended within the extent of the injunction, of "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."*

3. The duty we are recommending is enforced by its tendency, under the blessing of God, to form the minds of children and servants to the love and practice of religion. On those persons, if there be any such present, who look upon religion to be a delusive fancy, instead of the most important concern in the world, we despair of making any impression in this discourse: but with those who believe it to be the one thing needful, the consideration now mentioned will have considerable weight.

Nothing is more certain than that whatever we wish others to practise, we must exemplify in our conduct as well as enjoin. The truth of this observation extends to every branch of conduct without exception. Would we wish to impress on young persons a sound regard to veracity? we must maintain a strict regard to it in our own intercourse with mankind. Are we desirous to train up our families in the observation of the rules of justice? we must take care to signalize our attachment to it by exemplary uprightness in our own behaviour. In every department of moral and religious conduct, we must not only point out the path, but lead the way. The application of this remark to the subject in hand is extremely obvious. Your wish, we take it for granted, is to train up your children in the fear of the Lord, and, as a necessary [branch] of this, in the practice of prayer. Is it likely you will succeed in that wish while you neglect to afford them an example of what you wish them

* Eph. vi. 18.

to practise? What, under the blessing of divine grace, is so calculated to impress them with a conviction of the importance of prayer, as the being called, at stated intervals, to take part in your devout supplications to God? While they witness your constancy, assiduity, and fervour in this exercise, they cannot fail of acknowledging its importance, without avowing a contempt of parental example.

A household in which family prayer is devoutly attended to, conjoined with the reading of the Scriptures, is a school of religious instruction. The whole contents of the sacred volume are in due course laid open before its members. They are continually reminded of their relation to God and the Redeemer, of their sins, and their wants, and of the method they must take to procure pardon for the one and the relief of the other. Every day they are receiving "line upon line, and precept upon precept." A fresh accession is continually making to their stock of knowledge; new truths are gradually opened to their view, and the impressions of old truths revived. A judicious parent will naturally notice the most striking incidents in his family in his devotional addresses: such as the sickness, or death, or removal for a longer or shorter time, of the members of which it is composed. His addresses will be varied according to circumstances. Has a pleasing event spread joy and cheerfulness through the household? it will be noticed with becoming expressions of fervent gratitude. Has some calamity overwhelmed the domestic circle? it will give occasion to an acknowledgement of the divine equity; the justice of God's proceedings will be vindicated, and grace implored through the blood of the Redeemer, to sustain and sanctify the stroke.

When the most powerful feelings, and the most interesting circumstances, are thus connected with religion, it is not unreasonable to hope that, through divine grace, some lasting and useful impressions will be made. Is not some part of the good seed thus sown, and thus nurtured, likely to take root and to become fruitful? Deeply as we are convinced of the deplorable corruption of the

human heart, and the necessity, consequent on this, of divine agency to accomplish a saving purpose, we must not forget that God is accustomed to work by means; and surely none can be conceived more likely to meet the end. What can be so likely to impress a child with a dread of sin, as to hear his parent constantly deprecating the wrath of God as justly due to it; or to induce him to seek an interest in the mediation and intercession of the Saviour, as to hear him imploring it for him, day by day, with an importunity proportioned to the magnitude of the subject? By a daily attention on such exercises, children and servants are taught most effectually how to pray: suitable topics are suggested to their minds; suitable petitions are put into their mouths; while their growing acquaintance with the Scriptures furnishes the arguments by which they may "plead with God."

May I not appeal to you who have enjoyed the blessing of being trained up under religious parents, whether you do not often recall with solemn tenderness what you felt in domestic worship; how amiable your parent appeared interceding for you with God? His character appeared at such seasons doubly sacred, while you beheld in him not only the father, but the priest over his household; invested not only with parental authority, but with the beauty of holiness.

Where a principle of religion is not yet planted in the hearts of the young, family prayer, accompanied with the reading of the Scriptures, is, with the divine blessing, the most likely means of introducing it. Where it already subsists, it is admirably adapted to cherish, strengthen, and advance it to maturity: in the latter case it is like the morning and the evening dew at the root of the tender blade.

On the contrary, when there is no public acknowledgement of God in a family, nothing can be expected but that children and servants should grow up ignorant and careless of their highest concerns. You may pretend, indeed, that you are punctual in your private devotions; but, without observing that, this pretence, under

such circumstances, will seldom bear a rigorous examination. What is that part of your conduct that falls under the notice of your domestics, that distinguishes you from those unhappy persons who live without God in the world? If the Scriptures are not read, if your family is never convened for worship, no trace or vestige of religion remains. A stranger who sojourns in such a family will be tempted to exclaim, with much more truth and propriety than Abraham on another occasion, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place."

4. The practice of family worship may be expected to have a most beneficial influence on the character and conduct of the heads of families themselves. In common with other means of grace, it is reasonable to expect it will have this influence. Of all the means of grace, prayer is the most beneficial. But prayer under the circumstances we are now contemplating, is likely to be productive of advantages which deserve to be considered by themselves.

He who statedly invites others to be witnesses of his devotions, invites a peculiar inspection of his behaviour; and must be conscious to how much observation and contempt he lays himself open, should he betray a flagrant inconsistency between his prayers and his conduct. That parent who, morning and evening, summons his family to acts of devotion, is not, perhaps, distinctly aware of the total amount of the influence this circumstance has upon his mind. It will act as a continual monitor, and will impose useful restraint upon his behaviour. He recollects that he is about to assume an awful and venerable character in the eyes of his domestics—a character which must set the indulgence of a multitude of improprieties in a most glaring light. Is he in danger of being ensnared into indecent levity, or of contracting a habit of foolish jesting and talking? he recollects he is soon to appear as the mouth of his family in addressing the blessed God. Is he surrounded with temptations to an immoderate indulgence of his fleshly appetites in meats and drinks; should he yield to the temptation, how would he bear, in the eyes of his family, to appear on

his knees before God? Is he tempted to use harsh and provoking language to his children? he recollects he is in a few hours to bear them in his arms before the Lord. He is to commend his companion in life to the divine mercy and protection; how, then, can he be "bitter against her?" The case of his servants is to be shortly presented before God in social prayer: under such a recollection, it will surely not be difficult for him to forbear threatening, reflecting that he himself has a Master in heaven. Knowing that in the hearing of all his inmates he is about to bewail the corruptions of his nature, to implore pardon for his sins, and strength to resist temptation; will he not feel a double obligation, on this account, to struggle against that corruption, and anxiously to shun temptation? The punctual discharge of the duty we are contending for will naturally strengthen his sense of the obligation of domestic duties, forcibly remind him of what he owes to every member of the domestic circle, and cement the ties of conjugal and parental affection.

5. I proceed to notice a few of the probable pleas which will be urged for the neglect of this duty.

(1.) The most plausible I can think of is want of ability. To this it would not be easy to furnish a reply, did it absolutely require a degree of ability above the most ordinary measure. They who urge this plea may be conscious of their incapacity to become the mouth of others in extemporary prayer, but this is by no means necessary. Excellent forms, expressive of the wants and desires of all christian families, may be obtained, which, supposing the inability alleged to be real, ought by all means to be employed. We, as dissenters, for the most part use and prefer free prayer. But God forbid we should ever imagine this the only mode of prayer which is acceptable to God. We cannot doubt that multitudes of devout persons have used forms of devotion with great and eminent advantage. To present our desires before God, in reliance on the atonement of the Mediator, is the real end of prayer, [and] is equally acceptable, whether it be offered with or without a preconceived form of words.

The plea of mental inability will not stand the test of an examination, unless it include an incapacity to read; a case comparatively rare, and which, we hope, is continually becoming rarer, and applies to few instances of the neglect we are complaining of.

It is more than probable that those who complain of this inability have never made the trial, and, consequently, never can form any accurate judgement of their qualifications. Were you to make the attempt, beginning with the use of a form if absolutely necessary, and making variations and additions as your feelings may suggest, you would find the accomplishment of that gracious promise, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."

If your omission of family prayer is accompanied with a similar neglect of private devotion, your situation is, indeed, deplorable; you are living "without God in the world." But supposing you to make conscience of private prayer, why not adopt the same method in domestic worship, with the addition of such petitions as the circumstance of its greater publicity may require? Beware lest a secret disaffection to God, a secret enmity to his person and his ways, lies at the foundation of this apology. It wears a show of humility, but it is but a mere shadow of it without the substance.

(2.) Another class of persons are ready to admit the propriety and utility of this practice, but allege that such is the variety and multitude of their worldly avocations, that they cannot spare the time requisite for this exercise. Let such be urged to remember that the time necessary for the purpose we are recommending is very small—five minutes will suffice for reading an ordinary chapter; [not many more for the utterance of a fervent] prayer; so that the exercise, morning and evening, need occupy little, if any thing, more than half an hour. And is this a space too much to be allotted, in the most busy life, for an exercise so sacred in its obligation, and so replete with advantage as this has been shown to be? Where is the man so incessantly occupied as not to allow himself more leisure than this, frequently, if not

habitually; that does not allot more time to objects of confessedly inferior magnitude?

In addition to what has been advanced, it would not be difficult to prove that no loss of time will usually result; for what may seem a loss will be more than compensated by that spirit of order and regularity which the stated observance of this duty tends to produce. It will serve as an edge and border to preserve the web of life from unravelling; it will tend to keep every thing in its proper place and [time]; and this practice will naturally introduce a similar regularity into other employments.

Consider for a moment on what principle does the plea of want of time depend. Plainly on this: that religion is not the grand concern; that there is something more important than the service of God; that the pleasing and glorifying of our Maker is not the great end of human existence;—a fatal delusion, a soul-destroying mistake, which militates against the whole spirit of the gospel, and presumptuously impeaches the wisdom of that Saviour who exclaimed, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

(3.) Another class will perhaps reply, "We are convinced of the urgent obligation of the duty which has been recommended; but we have so long neglected it that we know not how to begin,—are ashamed at the prospect of the surprise, the curiosity, it will occasion.

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But there is much impiety in this shame; and if it be permitted to deter you from complying with the dictates of conscience and the commands of God, it will unquestionably class you with "the fearful and unbelieving, who shall have their portion in the second death." To be ashamed of the service of Christ is to be ashamed of Christ and his cross; and you have heard the divine denunciation of judgement on such characters. "Whoso-

* Matt. vi. 33.

ever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."* You are afraid of presenting yourself under a singular aspect to your domestics and acquaintance: have you not reflected on the awful and trying situation in which you will be placed by the infliction of the sentence, justly merited, "Of him will I be ashamed;" "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee?"

II. Hints on the practice. Best mode of performing it.

1. Let it ever be joined with reading the Scriptures.
2. Let it be constant.
3. Attend with a full decision of mind, with the utmost seriousness.
4. Seek the aid of the Spirit.

XXVII.

REFLECTIONS ON THE INEVITABLE LOT OF HUMAN LIFE.

Eccles. xi. 8.—*If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.*

There is nothing better established by universal observation, than that the condition of man upon earth is, less or more, an afflicted condition: "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."† As the sparks ascend by an immutable law in nature, so the sorrows to which we are exposed spring from necessity, from causes whose operation is unavoidable and universal. Look through all the generations of man, throughout all times and places, and see if you can discover a single individual who has not, at one period or another, been ex-

* Mark viii. 38. † Job v. 7.

posed to the arrows of adversity. The roll or record of human destiny is written "within and without, with lamentation and mourning, and woe."*

We are naturally extremely and immoderately attached to worldly enjoyments and to temporal prospects. Our souls cleave to them with an eagerness extremely disproportioned to their real value, which is one of the maledictions incurred by the fall. The curse denounced upon the earth for man's sake has contracted the sum of earthly good within a narrow compass, and blasted it with much vanity; but has not had the effect of dispelling the charm by which it engages our affections. It is a part of the misery of man, in his fallen state, that he has become more attached than ever to the world, now that it has lost its value. Having swerved from God, and lost his true centre, he has fallen into an idolatry of the world, and makes it the exclusive object of his attachment, even at the very time that its beauty is marred and its satisfactions impaired.

"It is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun."† While the sun of earthly prospects shines, we are apt to feel the day of evil at a distance from our minds; we are reluctant to admit the possibility of a change of scene; we shut out the thought of calamity and distress as an unwelcome intruder.

The young revel in the enjoyment of health, and exult in the gay hopes and enchanting gratifications suited to that delightful [season], as though they were never to know a period. Amused and transported with [their] situation and [their] prospects, it is with extreme difficulty they admit the conviction that the days are fast approaching when they shall confess they have no pleasure in them. "Let us enjoy the good things that are present." "Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments, and let no flower of the spring pass by us." "Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered."‡

* Ezek. ii. 10. † Eccles. xi. 7.
‡ Wisdom of Solomon ii. 8.

Experience, in most cases, soon alters their sentiments, and events arise which impress an indelible conviction of the short duration of earthly good. The bloom of health is blasted by disease ; the seeds of some incurable malady begin to shoot up, and make their appearance ; or the agony of disappointed passions is impressed ; or cares and anxieties begin to corrode the mind ; or the hand of death [inflicts] some fatal stroke, by which the object of the tenderest affection is snatched away.

If a long course of prosperity has been enjoyed, during which almost every thing has succeeded to the wish, (which sometimes, though very rarely, occurs,) the confidence in worldly hopes and prospects is mightily increased ; the mind is more softened and enervated by an uninterrupted series of prosperity, and is the more unfitted to [go through] those scenes of distress which inevitably await him. He who is in this situation is tempted to say, "I shall surely die in my nest :"* or, in the language of the rich man in the gospel, "Soul, eat, drink, and be merry ; thou hast goods laid up for many years."†

The whole system of worldly amusement is adapted to make us forget the real condition of human life, to disguise every object, and to invest the present state with a sort of theatrical glow. It is contrived, in every part of it, to banish reflection, to hide the future from the view, and to make us overlook the evils of life, and the realities of eternity. But still, as the nature of things remains the same, as the course of human events can no more be arrested than the tide, the only effect of this voluntary infatuation is, to render the stroke of calamity, when it does fall, doubly heavy, by leaving the soul without preparation and without resources. "Their fear cometh as desolation, and their destruction as a whirlwind."‡ The lot of mankind is, sooner or later, a state of suffering, from which no past successes, no seeming stability in our station, can possibly secure.

* Job xxix. 18. † Luke xii. 19. ‡ Prov. i. 27.

"Though a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity."*

It is wisdom, then, to form a just estimate of human life; to correct the illusions of our passions; and to regulate our expectations respecting the good and evil of the present, by the result of universal observation and experience. It is Solomon, that model of a great and prosperous prince, whose [mental] attainments, exalted station, and extraordinary prosperity, combined to confer upon him, as far as possible, an exemption from suffering, who, under the dictate of the Holy Spirit, penned these words, "If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many."

Let us proceed briefly to consider what improvement should be made of this view of human life, of this universal exposure to affliction.

I. The first lesson it should teach us is, that we are not in the situation in which man was first formed. The original destination of man was not a state of suffering. When God first formed the world, on surveying all that he had created, he pronounced it to be "very good."† If it now be very evil, there must be a change in the state and condition of *mankind*, since the Supreme Being is immutable. It would be utterly repugnant to his perfections to doom an innocent creature to so much suffering; and the Word of God expressly declares "he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men."‡ Hence, calamities are styled chastisements throughout the Scriptures, and are invariably spoken of as expressions of the divine anger. Under the administration of a wise and holy Being, had there been no sin, there would have been no suffering. Tyrants may delight in displaying their power over their vassals, by inflicting upon them unmerited punishments; but, far be it from us to suspect such conduct in "the Holy One of Israel,"§ in Him who "delighteth in mercy."||

* Eccles. xi. 8. † Gen. i. 31. ‡ Lam. iii. 33.
§ Ezek. xxxix. 7. || Mic. vii. 18.

The unspeakable calamities to which we are exposed, in our passage through life, announce our fallen state; nor is it possible to give any consistent account of them, without referring them, as the word of God uniformly does, to our original defection and departure from God. In this light his conduct in afflicting them appears unexceptionably just and proper. We "have forsaken the fountain of living water,"* and it is just that the "cisterns" to which we repair should be "broken." We have served and loved "the creature more than the Creator;"† and it is just that created comforts should be imbittered. We have virtually declared by our conduct, that there is no happiness to be found in God: how fitting is it that he should declare 'You shall find it nowhere else;' how equitable is it that he who leans upon an "arm of flesh,"‡ instead of trusting in the living God, should often [find] it to be a broken reed, which wounds him who stays himself upon it, instead of affording him support! When we consider what a scene of indescribable distress the state of the world presents at this moment;—the devastation of [nations]; the sudden reverses of fortune in the highest ranks; and the penury, embarrassment, and distress in the lower;—who does not see [in these] the tokens of the [divine] displeasure; who can fail to perceive the marks of a fallen state, and that the Lord has a controversy, by which he pleads with all flesh?

We have all been guilty of spiritual idolatry, and the Lord, in his justice, spreads our carcases before the objects of our guilty attachment. "At that time, saith the Lord, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: and they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they

* Jer. ii. 13. † Rom. i. 25. ‡ Jer. xvii. 5.

have worshipped."* Let us no longer regard the calamities of life as the offspring of chance, or the product of blind necessity, but, agreeably to the oracles of God, as the judgements of the Lord.

II. Let the consideration of the universal exposure of man to calamities and sufferings prevent our being surprised or astonished when it becomes our own lot. When we are unexpectedly led into scenes of trial, we are apt to be filled with emotion, "as though some strange thing had happened unto us;"† and perhaps are tempted to suspect that we are treated with an unjustifiable rigour. We are ready, too often, to draw invidious comparisons between ourselves and those who, we suppose, are dealt with in a more favourable manner; and secretly to say, Why am I thus afflicted and distressed; why am I set as a mark for his arrows? It might be sufficient, in order to repress such emotions, to remember that the Lord is a sovereign who gives no account of his matters: shall the thing formed say to him that formed him, "Why hast thou made me thus?" "Who art thou that repliest against God?"‡ "Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?"§ We must be strangely unacquainted with ourselves, if we are not aware, that he has corrected us less than our iniquities deserve. These considerations, however, though not slight, are not the only ones which are fitted to calm the tumult of the breast. We may, with advantage to ourselves, and unitedly with the most perfect benevolence, cast our eyes abroad, to contemplate the universality of distress. We are not the only or the greatest sufferers: we have innumerable companions in tribulation. Without giving scope to imagination, or quitting the realities of life, we may easily find among our fellow-creatures instances of deeper woe, and more complicated distresses, than those which we feel. Here we may see a person, like Job, flourishing in affluence, and reduced, by a sudden and unexpected stroke, to the depth of penury.

* Jer. viii. 1, 2. † 1 Pet. iv. 12.
‡ Rom. ix. 20. § Lam. iii. 39.

There we may behold another, like the same illustrious sufferer, deprived in a very short season of all his offspring by death. There we see the widowed mother of a numerous family at a loss to still the cries of her children who are clamorous for bread. If we turn in another quarter, we may find a poor unhappy creature wasting away under an incurable and painful disorder, where the only vigorous principle seems to be the living cancer which corrodes him. Hear the bitter lamentation of Job: "Even to-day is my complaint bitter, and my stroke heavier than my groaning."* "When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? I am full of tossings to and fro."† "Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together!" "therefore my words are swallowed up." "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit."‡ Hear the man after God's own heart exclaim, "I water my couch with my tears,§ and mingle my drink with weeping."|| "By reason of grief my flesh is dried up, and my heart is withered as grass."¶ Look at the history, not of the enemies only, but of the most eminent servants of God, and you will generally find their trials as conspicuous as their piety: so true is it that the high road to heaven is through suffering; and that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom."**

If we are tempted to repine at seeing others in peace and prosperity, while we are harassed and distressed, we form a most inadequate and premature judgement. Their period of trial will arrive; their day of calamity is also approaching; the mildew that blights their enjoyments is prepared; and from the evil omen of adversity it will be impossible for them to escape, more than ourselves. "If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many."

* Job xxiii. 2. † Job vii. 4. ‡ Job vi. 2, 3, 4.
§ Psalm vi. 6. || Psalm cii. 9. ¶ Psalm cii. 4.
** Acts xiv. 22.

III. Here we learn the propriety of not looking for happiness on earth. "This is not our rest: it is polluted."* A state exposed to so much calamity can never have been designed as the scene of enjoyment; it must have been calculated for the purpose of trial. It is not Canaan; it is the wilderness through which the chosen tribes were destined to pass in their way to it; it is a vale of tears, [along] which the christian pilgrim toils and struggles in his passage to the heavenly kingdom. Let us understand the real nature of our present condition; let us learn that nothing belonging to it is merely or principally intended for our gratification; that it is well suited to be the abode of a sinful creature upon trial, under a dispensation of mercy; where there is just enough of good to support under evil, and those prospects of greater good afforded in a future state, which are sufficient to dispel despondency. It is a condition characterized by vicissitude, by danger, by suffering, and by hope; and he is to be esteemed the happiest man who most surmounts its tempests, escapes its pollutions, and is sanctified by its trials. Are you at present in circumstances of ease and comfort? be thankful for it, but place no reliance on its continuance. Enjoy with moderation whatever is gratifying in your lot, but let it not engage your heart, let it not deeply entangle your affection. By an intimate converse with the promises of the gospel, learn to live above [the world], and consider it not as [constituting] your portion or your happiness. Study, indeed to the utmost to be dead to the world, and alive to God; that "when he, who is our life, shall appear, ye also shall appear with him in glory."†

IV. Let us all be engaged to lay in a suitable preparation for the days of adversity. Let us be aiming to acquire, by faith and prayer, and the diligent perusal of the Scriptures, those principles which will effectually support us in the dark and cloudy day.

The christian character is [formed] of such dispositions as are each of them apart, and still more when

* Micah ii. 10. † Col. iii. 4.

combined, adapted to support the soul amidst the severest trials. Under the influence of these, the christian believer fears none of those things that may happen. Faith, by elevating the attention to a future world—to the glory to be revealed, by imparting to the real christian a living sense of that atonement which is given in the gospel, is a principle of primary efficacy. The habitual disposition to look upon this present state as a passage and a pilgrimage, which is deeply wrought into the christian character, is of itself an admirable preparation for suffering. The solemn renunciation of the world included in this [impression] of the [mind] tends immediately to the same effect. Thus the joys of faith, the consolations of the Holy Ghost, raise the soul to a surprising elevation above the storms and trials of life.

XXVIII.

ON CHASTISEMENT RESULTING IN PENITENCE.

Jer. xxxi. 18.—*Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.*

This chapter contains great and gracious promises made to the people of Israel upon the prospect of their true repentance. They are assured that, notwithstanding the severe rebukes of Providence, the Lord had mercy in reserve, when their afflictions had answered the purpose for which they were appointed, in humbling and reforming them,

Before God visits his people with consolation, he prepares them for it by inspiring a penitential spirit; well knowing that to indulge them with his smiles, while they continue obstinate and unreclaimed, would neither comport with his character, nor contribute to their good. His benignity, and condescension are sufficiently evinced in his "waiting to be gracious;" in the promptitude with which he pardons the humble penitent. He shows

himself attentive to the first movement of the contrite heart agreeable to his declaration in the passage before us, "I have surely heard Ephraim." In these words we have the picture of the inmost feelings of a humble and penitent heart. We behold it in the deepest retirement, without the least disguise, pouring itself out before God.

In these remarkable words we have an acknowledgement and a prayer.

I. These words contain an acknowledgement—"Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke."

1. This expression we conceive to denote the inefficacy of former corrections. In the Septuagint it is rendered, "As a bullock, I was not taught: thou didst chastise me, and I was chastised." This was all; and no other effect ensued than the uneasy pain which chastisement necessarily imparts. Ephraim is represented as conscious that former corrections had answered little purpose. He laments the little improvement he had made, and prays for such an interposition of divine power and grace as may work an efficient conversion: "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." The rebukes of Providence are often represented in the Scriptures in this light.—"And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."*

Since afflictive dispensations "spring not from the dust," but are ordained of God, who takes no pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures, nor "willingly afflicts the children of men;"†—since a state of innocence would have included an exemption from every sorrow on the one hand, and the sufferings of life are not, for the most part, destructive,—there is no light in which it is so natural to consider them as chastisements; which are effects of displeasure, but not of a displeasure intended for the destruction of its object, but the amendment.

* Heb. xii. 5, 6. † Lam. iii. 33.

2. Though corrections are calculated to produce amendment, though such is their tendency and design, it is evident, from observation and experience, they often fail in accomplishing the effect. It is not uncommon to see men hardened under rebukes, and to grow more bold and presumptuous in the commission of sin, after having experienced severer trials than before. This melancholy fact is of no recent observation; it is frequently described and lamented in the word of God. "Thou hast stricken them," says Jeremiah, "but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock: they have refused to return."*

Of the inefficacy of mere external correction, we have a striking proof in the conduct of the generations who were conducted from Egypt under the hand of Moses. Never were a people more frequently or more severely corrected, and never did a people [show] themselves more incorrigible. While the remembrance of their sufferings was fresh, they seemed disposed in earnest to seek God; but no sooner did the sense of their calamities wear off, than they relapsed into all their former disobedience and rebellion. "When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the most high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongue."† This is but a picture of what we may observe every day. We see men, under afflictive dispensations, evince a degree of emotion; they appear, in some measure, humbled and convinced; and, with much apparent sincerity, confess their persuasion of the vanity of the world, and of the utter impossibility of finding happiness out of the ways of religion. If they are brought to the brink of the grave, and eternity presents itself to their immediate prospect, we find them making the most solemn resolutions, condemning their former course of life, and resolving, if spared, to enter on

* Jer. v. 3.

† Psalm lxxviii. 34—36.

a new course. The frivolous objects which before engaged their attention seem to have lost their charm, and a flattering prospect is exhibited of their turning into the path of wisdom. From their subsequent conduct, however, it is manifest their passions were only laid asleep, while their principles continued unchanged. The influence of the world was suspended, not destroyed. The novelty of their situation put new thoughts into their minds, and awakened fears to which before they had been strangers. But as the whole impression was to be ascribed to circumstances, when these circumstances were changed, the mind returned to its former state. Their "goodness was as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, which passeth away." The serious impressions they felt during the season of affliction were never followed up. They terminated in no regular attachment to the serious exercises of piety; or, if they were led to pray at all, they were not sufficiently deep and abiding to produce a perseverance in that duty. The recovery of health, or the return of prosperity gradually, but speedily, effaced every trace of serious feeling, and left them, perhaps, in a state of deeper alienation from God than ever.

3. Ephraim is here represented as reflecting upon it. (Proximate causes of the inefficacy of correction by itself.)

4. Inattention to the hand of God, and, as a natural consequence, their neglecting to pass from the contemplation of their sufferings to their sins. Religion begins with consideration. Till they are brought to thorough reflection, no real improvement can be expected. It was a frequent complaint with the Messiah, "My people will not consider." "The Lord crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."* If we consider affliction as springing from the dust, and content ourselves with looking only at secondary causes, or human instruments, no wonder, * * * * * *
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* Micah vi. 9

Men are apt to spare themselves; to give way to a dangerous pusillanimity, by shrinking from reflections which, however useful in their tendency, they find to be painful. They are apt to consider their sufferings as expiatory.

5. In the serious purpose of a religious life, formed under afflictive dispensations, too many depend entirely upon resolutions formed in their own strength. To such purposes may be applied the beautiful image of Nahum: "As the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known."*

II. The prayer,—"Turn thou me," [may be] enforced by such arguments as these:—

1. The plea of necessity. There is no other resource. It is evident something is wanting, some divine [agency], which shall produce the effect which external events have failed to [produce].

2. To entreat God to turn is not to ask an impossibility. The residue of the Spirit is with him.

3. It is worthy of his interposition. The turning the heart is a fit occasion on which Omnipotence may act.

4. The plea may be enforced by precedents. It implies no departure from his known methods.

5. We may enforce it by a reference to the divine [mercy].

XXIX.

ON THE COMFORTS OF CHRISTIANS UNDER EITHER WORLDLY OR SPIRITUAL TRIALS.

Psalm xciv. 19.—*In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.*†

Let us take a brief survey of the internal thoughts, of a distressing nature, which are apt to arise in the mind of a good man; and next observe the tendency of the

* Nahum iii. 17.

† Preached at Leicester, December, 1815.

comforts of the gospel, to assuage or remove the uneasiness which they have occasioned.

I. Let us take a survey of some of the distressing thoughts which are apt to oppress the mind of a good man. They may be considered as relating to these objects; the state of the world, the state of the church, and his own state as an individual.

1. The state of the world. When a good man surveys the general prevalence of irreligion and impiety, when he considers how few there are, comparatively, who seek after God, or are moved by any impression of a serious nature, he cannot but be affected. "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law."* When again, he considers whither such a course must tend, and in what it will possibly issue, the prospect is still more alarming. It is no want of charity to suspect that the greater part of mankind fall short of the condition of salvation; it is the very consequence of submission to the authority of revelation. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."†

2. The state of the church. The palpable inconsistency between the lives of numerous professors of religion, and the real import of that profession. The many instances of gross immorality which are found in the christian church, [supply] the subject of much distressing reflection to the sincere follower of Christ. It was to St. Paul: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." The injury sustained by the divine honour, the discredit reflected on the gospel from this quarter, surpasses calculation.

The obstructions permitted to present themselves to the propagation of divine truth are of a sinister tendency, and give birth to many a painful reflection in the minds of such as have the interest of Zion at heart. In how many instances is the introduction of saving light pre-

* Psalm cxix. 158, 53. † Matt. vii. 13

vented by the exercise of intolerance, while the most detestable corruption and idolatry are sanctioned and upheld by the same means? In how many instances have the fairest prospects of good been suddenly blasted by superior power, the faint embers of the true religion almost extinguished, and its possessors exposed to all the severities of persecution?

Such is the state of the protestants in [the south of] France at this moment.* From an authentic statement, lately sent me, it appears that they are treated with the utmost cruelty, compelled to quit their habitations, hunted and driven like wild beasts; infants are torn from their mothers, in order to be initiated into the mysteries of antichrist; and, in some instances, whole families are massacred. Who can fail to be affected? So contrary to recent expectation, so offensively repugnant to the design of Providence, and the dictates of prophecy, who can fail to exclaim with the pious Joshua—" What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" " Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread?"†

3. Uneasy thoughts arising from his state as an individual. " Every heart knows his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith."

Here we may briefly [advert to] trials of a worldly, and trials of a spiritual, nature.

(1.) Under the first of these, religion neither demands nor boasts a perfect insensibility. The inspired psalmist displayed a great vicissitude of feeling, arising from this quarter; he mourned under the calumny and oppression of his enemies, and gave utterance to cries and tears under his affliction. He felt with agonized poignancy the insults he met with on account of his pious confidence in God: " As with a sword in my bones, while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?"‡ The personal and domestic sufferings of Job are familiar to your recollection, and are penned [that they may] be monuments, to all ages, of the severity with which God

* Viz. in 1815. See note, p. 307. † Psalm liii. 4. ‡ Ps. xlii. 10.

sanctifies and tries his people, and of the happy and infallible issue.

(2.) Uneasy thoughts arise on a spiritual account. With a good man, his spiritual [welfare] is always an object of his first solicitude; so that when he contemplates the holiness and purity of God, he cannot but have, at times, many a serious inquiry how he shall appear before him. When he surveys his own pollution and guilt, the thought of appearing before God is one upon which he can scarcely dwell without secret trembling: "What if I shall be weighed in the balance and found wanting?" When we consider our low attainments, in religion compared with our opportunities, our latent corruption, and our frequent miscarriages and failures, we are often tempted to call in question the reality of our religion, and to fear that, after all, we are only "almost christians." If I am truly regenerate, and a child of God why am I thus? Why such a mixture of earthly and sensual affections? Whence such coldness and deadness in religious exercises? Why so little delight in the Scriptures,—so little complacency? "My soul cleaveth unto the dust."*

(3.) Under desertion, under the hidings of God's countenance, how many painful thoughts arise! how ready to indulge despondency, and to fear he will never be merciful any more!

(4.) In the prospect before him; in the contemplation of the dangers and temptations which still await him; while he feels in himself nothing but frailty and weakness, how apt is he to apprehend some fatal overthrow! It seems almost too much for him to expect to be more than conqueror; that he shall be able to make his way through such a host of enemies, and pass into the celestial city. He seems to feel himsel totally devoid of that spiritual strength and vigour which are requisite for such combats, which are necessary to enable him to vanquish such difficulties. He is ready to cry, "I shall never see that goodly moun-

* Psalm cxix. 25.

tain and Lebanon; I shall never see the king in his beauty, nor behold that land which is so far off."

II. Let us briefly notice the consolations of God opposed to these uneasy thoughts.

1. We first adverted to such as arise from the disordered state of the world.

On this subject great consolation springs from the conviction that the Lord reigneth. There sit at the helm infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. These perfections are of such a nature that renders it impossible for them to lie dormant or inactive: they are in perpetual operation; and, in the final result, they will appear with ineffable splendour and beauty.

"Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgement are the habitation of his throne." Under the administration of such a Being, all events will infallibly terminate well,—well for the interests of his glory, and well for the interests of his people.

With whatever [uneasiness] we may contemplate the prevalence of moral disorder, and its portentous effects in a future state, the page of revelation assures us, that ultimately the world will be filled with holy and happy creatures; that religion and virtue will prove triumphant; and that all nations shall see the glory of God, and worship at his footstool. And with respect to the final state of the wicked, there is every reason to conclude that their numbers will bear no proportion to those of the blessed, and that thus no more misery will be inflicted than what will be rendered conducive to the order and happiness of the universe.

2. Under painful apprehensions respecting the state of the church, the comforts of God are neither few nor small. It behoves us, on such occasions, to reflect that it is incomparably more his care than ours; that as the Saviour bought it with his blood, he will not fail to guide and govern it in the best manner possible. He has promised "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." His interpositions in its favour afford a pledge of what he will still accomplish: "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Sheba for thee. Since thou wast precious

in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."*

Afflictions [are] designed to purify the church.

3. Under the distressing thoughts arising from the state of a christian, as an individual, the divine comforts are proposed.

In temporal affliction and privations, how consoling is it to reflect that they are all ordered in infinite wisdom, and proceed from the purest benignity; that they will issue in our advantage, and that they will be but of short duration. This, may the afflicted christian reflect, is not an eternal state; these afflictions are but for a moment. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."†

XXX.

ON HUMILITY BEFORE GOD.

JAMES iv. 10.—*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.*

In that portion of his epistle to which these words belong, we find that James is addressing, not the professed christians, but their avowed enemies and persecutors, probably his countrymen, who still continued to display the highest antipathy to christianity. "Whence," says he, "come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye desire, and have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?"‡

As the persons who were the objects of these remarks were, unquestionably, utterly estranged from the christian religion, and the enemies of God, it is evident the

* Isaiah xliii. 3, 4. † Psalm xxx. 5. ‡ James iv. 1—4.

duty inculcated in the words under our present notice, enters into the first elements of christian piety. It is reported of the celebrated Austin of Hippo, that being asked what was the first thing in religion, he said, "Humility;" when asked what was the second, he answered, "Humility;" and what was the third, he still returned the same answer, "Humility;"—alluding to the celebrated answer which the Athenian orator is said to have made on the subject of eloquence. It seemed to have been the intention of that great man to insinuate, that lowliness of mind, in the full extent of its operation, included nearly the whole of practical religion.

Humility may be considered in two views; either as it respects the Divine Being, or as it respects our fellow-creatures,—humility before God, or as it affects our sentiments and conduct towards men. But, while this distinction is admitted, it must be carefully remembered, that it is no longer a christian virtue than when it originates in just conceptions of the great Parent of the universe; that the basis of all social excellence, of a moral nature, is in a right state of the heart towards God. The virtues which are severed from that stock will soon languish and decay; and as they are destitute of proper principle, so are they neither stable nor permanent.

In this discourse we shall confine ourselves to the consideration of humility, in its aspect towards the Supreme Being; or, in other words, humility before God. It may be defined as consisting in that profound, habitual conviction of our nothingness, guilt, and pollution before God, which a just knowledge of ourselves will necessarily inspire. It is the rectitude of this conviction, it is its perfect conformity to the real nature of things, which renders it the object of divine approbation. It is the agreement betwixt the lowliness of our minds and the debasement of our character, and the depression of our state, which invests it with all its beauty, and all its value. The gracious notice which this disposition attracts is not owing to any intrinsic excellence in the object, any more than in lofty sentiments connected with a reflection on ourselves; but solelv because a deep hu-

miliation coincides with our true state and characters, as surveyed by the eye of Omniscience. In a word, it is the justness and the correctness of the feelings and convictions which enter into the composition of a humble mind, which give it all its worth.

Pride is the growth of blindness and darkness; humility, the product of light and knowledge; and while the former has its origin in a mistaken and delusive estimate of things, the latter is as much the offspring of truth, as it is the parent of virtue.

Let it be observed, that the disposition under consideration is not an occasional feeling arising from some sudden and momentary impulse; it is not a transitory depression, produced by some unexpected disclosure: in the good man, it is an habitual state of feeling; it is the quality in which his mind is uniformly attired; he is "clothed with humility." Wide and diffusive as its operation is, some conception of it may be formed by attending to the following observations:—

1. Humility in the sight of God will have a powerful influence on all our thoughts and reflections; on ourselves, on our character, condition, and prospects: a sense of inherent meanness and unworthiness in the sight of God will adhere closely to us, and will insensibly, and without effort, mingle with every recollection of the Supreme Being. A sort of self-annihilation before him will be natural and habitual; and by a recollection of his majesty, and a consciousness of our utter unworthiness to appear in his presence, we shall be no strangers to that ingenuous shame which will scarcely permit us to lift up our eyes to heaven. Under the influence of this principle, we shall be more apt to think of our faults than our virtues; of the criminal defects with which we are chargeable, than of any pretensions to excellence we may suppose ourselves to possess.

Our faults are our own; they originate entirely in ourselves; to us belong all their demerit and their shame: while, for whatever inherent good we may possess, we are indebted to divine grace, which has alone made us to differ. While there is none to share with

us the baseness and turpitude of our sinful actions, our virtues are to be ultimately traced to a source out of ourselves. Hence, whatever is wrong in our dispositions and conduct lays a foundation for unmingled humiliation; what is of an opposite nature supplies no pretext for unmingled self-complacency. Besides, it requires but little attention to perceive that our sins admit of no apology, while our highest attainments in holiness are accompanied by much imperfection: so that, while every pretension to merit is defeated, our demerits are real and substantial. True humbleness of mind will dispose us to form that correct estimate of ourselves, which can only result from an attention to the heart; the secret movements of which we may often perceive to be irregular and depraved, where the external conduct is correct; and innumerable pollutions and disorders may be detected there, by Him, "who seeth in secret," when all that is visible to man is innocent and laudable.

Here a prospect is opened to the contemplation of humble piety, which suggests occasion of abasement and humility before God, where [our friends] see nothing but matter of commendation and applause. It is this habit of inspecting the interior of the character, and of carrying the animadversions of conscience to the inmost thoughts and imaginations of the heart, that accounts for that unfailing lowliness and humility before God which is the constant appendage of exalted piety; and which reconciles the highest elevations of religion with the depths of self-abasement. This is sufficient to preserve alive a constant sense of deficiency in the most advanced christian; to scatter every idea of "having already attained," and of "being already perfect;" and to urge him to press forward towards the prize with unabating ardour. This was the spirit of the great apostle of the Gentiles,* and of the most illustrious heroes in the cause of Christ.

The self-reflective faculty is, by the constitution of our minds, so incessantly active, and the idea of self of such

* Phil. iii. 12–14.

frequent occurrence, that its effect on the character must be extremely different, according as it turns to the view its fairest or its darkest side. The habit on which we now speak, of directing the attention to criminal defects rather than to the excellencies of the character, is not only the dictate of humility; it is the absolute suggestion of prudence. Excellencies are not inspired by being often contemplated. He who delights to survey them, contributes nothing by that exercise to their prosperity or growth; on the contrary, he will be tempted to rest in the self-complacency they inspire, and to relax his efforts for improvement. Their purity and lustre are best preserved in a state of seclusion from the gaze even of the possessor. But, with respect to the faults and imperfections with which we are encompassed, it is just the reverse;—the more they are reflected on, the more fully they are detected and exposed, the greater is the probability that their growth will be impeded, and a virtuous resolution evinced to extirpate and subdue them. To think much upon our sins and imperfections, is to turn ourselves to that quarter in which our business lies. Meditating much on our virtues and good deeds is a useless occupation, since they will thrive best when abandoned to a partial oblivion.

Some consciousness, indeed, [in the christian] of his possessing the features of a renovated mind, and even of a progress in the practice of piety, is almost unavoidable, and is not without its use, inasmuch as it supplies a motive to gratitude, and a source of consolation; but the moment he finds himself drawing a self-complacency from such a retrospect, the enlightened christian is alarmed, nor will he suffer himself to dwell long upon an object, the survey of which is so replete with danger. He hastens to check himself in that delusive train of reflection, and to recall to his [mind the persuasion] that he has "not yet attained, nor is already perfect." The recollection that he is a fallen creature, exposed to righteous indignation; that his sins, though remitted, can never cease to be his, nor to retain all their turpitude and demerit; and that he is, whatever his attainments, still

a child of disobedience, and a pensioner on mercy;—the constant remembrance of these solemn and momentous truths, is sufficient to preserve a perpetual humiliation in the sight of God.

2. Humility before God will have a beneficial influence on the mind in which divine truth is contemplated, and its discoveries received. He who is humble before God, will be so conscious of his utter insufficiency to explain the mysteries of religion, that he will be inexpressibly thankful for divine communications. He will feel and recognize his absolute need of a guide in the momentous concerns of eternity. In the obscurity of reason, heightened by the perplexities of guilt, he will distinctly perceive his entire dependence upon Heaven for every ray of information respecting the great concern of reconciliation with the offended Deity; and while he disclaims all pretension to a title to the divine favour, he will be instantly convinced, that to solve the problem, "How man shall be just with God," must ever surpass the powers of finite reason.

Humility is the best preparation for studying the oracles of God, by destroying our confidence in every other teacher. "The meek will he guide in judgement: the meek will he teach his way."*

It is scarcely possible to conceive a greater presumption than those are guilty of who decide beforehand what it is fit and proper for revelation to communicate, and pertinaciously reject every doctrine, however clearly and unequivocally asserted, which is repugnant to their previous anticipations; as though we possessed some independent source of information sufficiently clear and determinate to limit and control the supernatural suggestions of divine truth. The supposition on which this conduct proceeds is utterly false and preposterous. Independently of revelation, we have no data from which we can infer the purposes of God, or the method of his dealing with fallen creatures. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath in-

* Psalm xxv. 9.

structed him?"* None knoweth "the things of God, but the Spirit of God."†

On the supposition we are combating, what necessity is there for revelation at all, since the pretension of being able to ascertain the contents of revelation beforehand, implies a previous degree of knowledge, which makes the illumination of scripture come too late? The necessity of revelation is founded on the supposition of insuperable ignorance; the power of ascertaining its subsequent discoveries is founded on knowledge; and the two suppositions destroy each other.

The usual pretence for rejecting some of the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel is, their mysterious nature; or, in other words, the impossibility of comprehending them in their full extent. That nothing that is repugnant to the plain dictates of reason can claim belief, is readily admitted, because impossibilities are not the objects of power, even supposing it to be infinite; but the mysteries of the gospel are not of this nature. They include, it is true, something which we cannot fully comprehend; but they contain nothing which the legitimate exercise of reason perceives to be absurd: they surpass the limits of reason, without doing violence to its dictates. And what is more natural to expect than that the communications of Infinite Wisdom should unfold objects to our view, which, in all their bearing and extent, transcend the feeble powers of a worm; or that assertions respecting the mode of divine existence, and the counsels of eternity, will be found, in the volume of revelation, most remote from our previous conjectures? The grandeur of God, the awful unfathomable depths of his wisdom, and the mysteriousness of his essence, would lead rather to a contrary supposition. Humility in the sight of God will at once scatter these chimeras, and bow the mind to the profoundest submission to divine teaching. He who knows himself will be prostrate in the presence of Infinite Majesty, and say, in the language of an eminent

* Rom. xi. 34. 1 Cor. ii. 16. † 1 Cor. ii. 11.

saint, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Far from measuring the communications of heaven by the standard of a preconceived hypothesis, he will attend, with child-like simplicity, to the oracles of God, and endeavour to subject "every thought and imagination to the obedience of Christ." He will abandon himself, with the utmost alacrity, to the directions of an infallible guide. He will permit "the deep things of God" to be unfolded by that Spirit which alone is able to search them, conscious that in the concerns of eternity "the foolishness of God is wiser than men."*

With a mind truly humble, the great principle which pervades the gospel will be found peculiarly congenial; and what is this but the principle of grace? The whole system of the gospel is emphatically "the gospel of the grace of God."† It is an exhibition of unmerited favour to a guilty and perishing world; and all the blessings which it proposes to bestow, all the hopes it inspires, are ascribed to this as its origin. Every idea of human desert is anxiously excluded, while the whole provision which it makes for the wants, the whole relief it affords to the misery of man, is ascribed solely to this source. To [exhibit] to the view "of principalities and powers in heavenly places," the riches of divine grace, is its avowed end and purpose. If he has "raised us up together with Christ, and made us to sit down with him in heavenly places," it is "that he may show forth to the ages to come the surpassing riches of his grace in his kindness toward us by Jesus Christ."‡ In every stage of the stupendous undertaking "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life."§

It is the triumph and preeminence of grace that forms the distinguishing character of the christian system, and which produces that insuperable disgust with which it is contemplated by those who, "going about to establish their own righteousness, refuse to submit themselves unto the righteousness of God." Hence the attempts are, in many instances, too successful, which are daily

* 1 Cor. i. 25. † Acts xx. 24. ‡ Ephes. ii. 6, 7. § Rom. v. 21.

witnessed, to disguise this its obnoxious feature, and by certain extenuations and refinements, to accommodate it to the pride of the sinful and unsanctified heart. Hence the deplorable infatuation of multitudes, who choose rather to perish in their sin, than to be so entirely and deeply indebted to unmerited favour as the system of the gospel implies. But, to a mind truly humbled, nothing is more welcome, nothing is more delightful, than the contemplation of revealed truth under this aspect. To feel himself under an unutterable obligation is [not an] oppressive load, from which the contrite in heart is anxious to be released. He cheerfully takes his proper place; loves to sink into the lowest depths of self-abasement; and values the blessings of salvation infinitely more for that

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XXXI.

ON PATIENCE.

Heb. x. 36.—*Ye have need of patience.*

This epistle was evidently directed to persons in a state of calamity and suffering, and contemplates its readers under that aspect. It was addressed to Jewish converts, who suffered from the rancorous bigotry and malice of their countrymen, who, in the commencement of christianity, were its most violent and formidable persecutors. It attaches to some remarkable period of persecution which they had sustained immediately on their professing the gospel. "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used."* In this trial they

* Heb. x. 32, 33.

had conducted themselves with great constancy and firmness, "taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods." Hence the apostle takes occasion to admonish them still to persevere in the hope and profession of the gospel, intimating that they were not to expect an exemption from future trials. "Ye have need of patience."

The state of christianity, in every age, has called for the exercise and cultivation of this grace. It is a quality in the composition of a christian which is never unnecessary, as he must not expect long to be in a situation where its exertion is not demanded.

I. The circumstances of christians are often such as to render its exercise indispensably requisite, if they would glorify God, by evincing a suitable spirit and conduct.

1. The trials which good men are called to endure are often very severe. They have their full share in the ordinary ills of life; besides trials which are peculiar to themselves, arising out of the nature of the christian profession.

On many of them poverty presses with an accumulated weight. They find it difficult, or impossible, with all the exertions they can make, to procure an adequate provision of the necessaries of life for themselves and families. They are obliged to content themselves with a scanty and insufficient diet, with clothing insufficient to protect them from the inclemencies of the season, which is sometimes aggravated by the state of their health being such as calls for certain comforts and indulgences, which it is out of their power to procure. Their subsistence is precarious; so that when they rise in the morning they have no certainty of being able to provide for the day that is passing over them; which is enough to overcast the mind with anxious and dismal forebodings. They could endure hardships themselves, perhaps, with tolerable composure; but it is distressing to see their helpless and innocent babes asking, with imploring looks, for that relief from hunger which they are unable to supply. How many a pious head of a family, in this,

and in almost every other country, is placed, at this moment, in these afflicting circumstances! and, surely, it will be readily acknowledged that such "have need of patience."

2. The trials under which many of the people of God are labouring are various and complicated: a confluence of afflictions meet together, and heighten and exasperate each other. The evils of poverty are aggravated by sickness and bodily pain; a constitution broken down with the weight of years and infirmities is added to domestic trials and disappointments, the most difficult to sustain. Those from whom assistance was expected, became cool and indifferent, perhaps hostile; and the anguish arising from confidence betrayed, and friendship violated, is added to every other evil. Thus David, in his old age, when his natural strength was much abated, had to struggle with the unnatural rebellion of his son, and with the treacherous desertion of some of his most intimate and endeared friends, those with whom he had often taken sweet counsel, and gone to the house of God in company. "Had it been an enemy I could have borne it, but it was thou, mine equal and my guide." When he had reason to hope he had surmounted his difficulties, and by great exertion and resolution weathered the storms of life, and was about to enter into a peaceful harbour, a sudden hurricane arose, which drove him back into the ocean, and threatened him with total destruction. Job, in like manner, was visited with stroke upon stroke: first his property was torn from him, then his children, then his health; lastly, the friends, from whom he expected support and consolation, turned his enemies and accusers. As he had great need of patience, so his exemplification of it though far from being perfeet, was such as to render his name illustrious through every succeeding age.

3. When heavy and complicated trials are of long continuance,—when, after enduring them long, no prospect of deliverance appears, no mitigation is experienced, —when there is none who can venture to set a period to calamities,—this is a circumstance that puts patience to

the severest test. It is much easier to bear a very acute pain or affliction for a short time, than one much more moderate during a very protracted period. The duration of trials is a severer exercise of patience than their severity. For a certain time the soul collects itself, and summons up its resolution to bear; but when the suffering continues long,* the mind becomes weary of exerting a continued effort, and is apt to yield to the force of impatience and inquietude. In these several situations, the christian has need of patience.

II. Let us consider the nature and the excellence of true patience. It is a grace of the Spirit of God. God condescends to be called the "God of patience;" and [we read of] "the kingdom [and patience] of [Jesus] Christ,"—[of] "the word of his patience." By means of it, they who suffer possess their souls. Another intention of this passage it is not necessary to mention: the present [being] instructive, and sufficiently adapted to the apparent design of the writer.

[There is] a great difference in the manner in which the same trials are borne by different persons:—some restless, complaining, dissatisfied with the conduct of Providence, and at all around them; others, though they feel, are yet composed, tranquil, self-possessed, capable of exercising their thoughts, and of exerting their reason, without disturbance—they "possess their souls." The happy effects of this frame of spirit are the following:—

1. He who in "patience possesses his soul," is able to trace his afflictions to the hand of God; looking through inferior instruments to the hand of the Supreme Director.

2. He is prevented from forming an erroneous and exaggerated estimate of his sufferings; from suspecting that they are singular and unparalleled; and thus from sinking into despondency, and indulging a spirit of com-

* Mr. Hall, who, there is great reason to believe, was, from his infancy to the time of his death, seldom free from severe pain, could draw these observations from a sad experience; while his uniform cheerfulness supplied a rare example of the grace he here describes.—Ed.

plaint; "knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

3. He is at leisure to [attend] to the instructions which afflictions contain, to learn those important lessons which they are best adapted to teach. Affliction is a school where we cannot learn, unless we, in some degree, possess our souls in patience. "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell these forty years."*

4. He who possesses his soul in patience, is able to perform many important duties while in a state of suffering. It is not a barren season to him. "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass."† Much cultivation of the heart, much internal spiritual discipline, may then be exercised.

5. He who thus possesses patience is at liberty to reach the promises of God, to open his mind to the consolations of the gospel. He can reason with his soul—"Why art thou so cast down, O my soul?"

6. While in patience we possess our souls, we can expatiate in the views of future blessedness.

* Deut. viii. 3, 4, 5. † Isaiah xxxii. 20.

XXXII.

ON CANDOUR AND LIBERALITY, AS EVINCED IN PROMOTING THE ERECTION OF PLACES OF WORSHIP.

LUKE vii. 5.—*He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.**

It is pleasing and instructive to behold in the narratives of scripture, frequent instances of the triumphs of divine grace over obstacles utterly insurmountable to any inferior power, and even striking examples of transcendent piety, where, considering the actual state of human nature, it was least to be expected. In these instances is verified the truth of our Lord's observation, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

* The sermon, of which the brief notes are here presented, was the last, except one, that Mr. Hall preached; though the notes seem to have been prepared for a former occasion. It was delivered on the morning of February 6, 1831, the Sunday previous to the attack which terminated in death. The students in the Bristol Education Society, (an institution devoted to the preparation of young men for the ministry in the Baptist persuasion,) had long been in the habit of preaching in various small places, in the more populous and wretched quarters of the city of Bristol; and, their labours being found productive of much good, it was judged expedient to erect a place of worship, which might not only contain the several small companies thus assembled, but accommodate others that might be induced to attend. A considerable sum of money was, accordingly, raised for this purpose; the building was commenced; and in order to contribute towards the remainder of the expense, it was proposed to make a collection in Broadmead chapel. Mr. Hall very warmly seconded the project, and recommended it, with great earnestness, after his morning sermon. In the evening he preached a very impressive and splendid discourse on the text—"Take heed, and beware of covetousness," of which he does not appear to have prepared any notes. This subject he meant to apply to the case of the new place of worship; but an exceedingly heavy rain occasioning a comparatively small congregation, he stated, towards the conclusion of the sermon, that it would not be doing justice to a cause in which he felt so lively an interest, to make the collection when much fewer persons than usual were present; and proposed to defer it, therefore to a future occasion. But, alas! this was the close of his public services; and they, who had so often seen his countenance beaming with intellect, benevolence, and piety, and listened to his voice with inexpressible delight, and many of them with permanent benefit, saw and heard him no more!—ED.

We learn that no combination of external circumstances, —no profession or situation in life, however beset with temptation,—no education, however unfavourable to the production of piety,—ought to make us despair of attaining salvation.

Are the habits of military life peculiarly hostile to piety, and is it difficult, in connexion with these, to maintain that humility, sobriety, and heavenly mindedness, which are so essential to religion? Our text exhibits, notwithstanding, a most eminent saint in the person of a centurion. Is a neglected, or what is still worse, a perverted education, a great obstacle in the way of salvation; an education from which religion has been entirely excluded, or religious principles inculcated, the most fatal and erroneous? Behold an instance of unparalleled devotion and faith in a Roman centurion, a heathen by birth, and as there is every reason to conclude trained up in the practice of idolatry from his earliest infancy. Is the possession of authority apt to intoxicate man with pride, and especially in proportion as that authority is arbitrary and despotic? We have here, in a Roman officer, a pattern of the deepest humility. Having occasion to apply to our Lord for the cure of his servant, he would not admit of his giving himself the trouble of coming in person, from a conviction that it was unnecessary, and that he was undeserving of such honour. Finally, are mankind apt to be ill affected to each other on account of difference of national character, and the opposition which [exists in their religion]? The opposition, in this respect, betwixt the Romans and the Jews, was as great as can well be imagined. The Romans were devoted to idolatry, and looked upon the Jews, who refused to join in the worship of idols, as a sort of atheists; they hated them for their singularity and their supposed unnatural antipathy to all other nations; and, at this time, despised them as a conquered people. The centurion, though he had been nursed in these prejudices, and was now, by very profession, employed in maintaining the Roman authority over Judea, yet "loved the Jewish nation, built them a synagogue," and sought

an interest in the affections of that people; so that the Jewish elders, sympathizing with him under his distress. are the bearers of his message to our Lord.

Let us attend to the hints of instruction suggested by the character which they here give of the centurion.

I. "He loveth our nation."

We have already remarked the superiority to prejudice which this trait in his character implies. We now observe, his attachment to the Jewish nation rested on solid grounds; it was such an attachment that it was next to impossible for a good man not to feel. The Jews were the only people in the world, before the coming of Christ, who were taken into an express covenant with God. To them, he stood in a relation different from that which he sustained towards any other people. He was their proper national head and king. The covenant on which he became so, was entered into at Mount Sinai, when Jehovah descended in a visible manner, uttered his laws in an audible voice, and, by the express consent of the people, communicated to Moses those statutes and ordinances which were ever after to form the basis of their polity, civil and religious, and a perpetual barrier of separation betwixt them and other nations. Conducted by a train of the most astonishing miracles to the land of Canaan, God was pleased to dwell amongst them by a miraculous symbol, and to make them the depositories of true religion. Thus the will of God was known, and his worship celebrated, whilst surrounding nations were sunk in the deepest ignorance. A succession of prophets was raised up at different periods; a body of inspired truths was communicated; a peculiar system of providence established, as far as their affairs were concerned; and a series of predictions preserved, by which an expectation was excited of the appearance of a divine person, of their race, who was to be the "light of the Gentiles," "the glory of Israel," the person in whom "all the nations of the earth were to be blessed." These high privileges and prerogatives are thus enumerated by St. Paul: "Who am an Israelite, of whom is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of

the law, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is God over all blessed for evermore."

As the centurion derived his knowledge of the Supreme Being from the Jews, either by conversing with them, or attending [their worship], he necessarily felt himself attached to that nation.

Religious benefits, as they are incomparably superior to all others, lay a foundation for the strongest attachment among men. If we are taught rightly to appreciate spiritual favours, we shall feel veneration and respect for those who, under God, have been the instruments of conveying them to us, far superior to what we feel towards any other persons.

To love the Jewish nation is still a natural dictate of piety. To that nation we are indebted for the records of inspiration, and the light of the gospel; for the men, who, under the direction of the Spirit, composed the former and published the latter among the pagans, were all Jews. Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, let it be remembered, were Jews; and though the Israelitish race are for the present suffering the vengeance of the Almighty for rejecting the Messiah, the blessings yet in reserve for them, to be bestowed at a future season, are great and signal. Separated for a time from the church of God for their unbelief, the period of their exaltation is deferred; but their glory is not extinguished: "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for their fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." They are the seed of a glorious church, the stock which remains in the earth; but which, at a future time, will revive and flourish in the beauty of holiness, and send forth its branches to the end of the earth. Though they have long lain "in the valley of vision till their bones are become very dry," yet the Lord in his own time, and that not a remote one, will "call to the four winds, the Spirit of God will revive them, their sinews will come upon their flesh, will cover them, and they shall live." As the

Jews were the first instruments in converting the nations to the faith of Jesus, so, we doubt not, it is to them the honour is reserved, of the final and universal propagation of the gospel: For "if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" On this account, when we behold the miserable outcasts of the Jewish nation, it is natural and proper for us to feel, in a manner similar to what we are accustomed to do on beholding a prince in exile and captivity, with the difference which arises from the certainty of their being restored to more than their former splendour: "when the Deliverer shall come from Sion, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

Was the Jewish nation an object of respect to the devout worshipper of God? How much more are the servants of Christ entitled to the same respect! The servants of Christ are "the true circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." They succeeded to the spiritual privileges of the Jewish church, and enjoy them in a still higher degree. They are the salt of the earth; they are, through the illuminations of the Sun of Righteousness, the "light of the world," the "city set on a hill, which cannot be hid."

The love of God will never fail to manifest itself by saving those, in every sect and denomination, who appear to be partakers of his holiness. "Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." With all their imperfections, true christians will invariably be esteemed by a good man as the excellent of the earth.

Having contemplated the attachment which the centurion displayed to the people of God, let us next consider in what manner his attachment was evinced. It was not an empty profession, productive of no fruit.

II. He "hath built us a synagogue." The original words are more emphatic: "*It is he who built us a synagogue.*" Synagogues were places of worship, where the Jews were wont to assemble on their sabbath, to

hear the law and the prophets read and interpreted, accompanied with suitable exhortations to the people, and to present prayer and praise to God. Wherever ten Jews resided, who were at leisure to attend the worship of God at ordinary times, as well as on the sabbath, it was the opinion of the Jewish rabbies, a synagogue ought to be erected. Thither the people resorted, not only to hear the law, but also to offer up their supplications; the times of prayer, which were at nine in the morning, at noon, and at three o'clock in the evening, corresponding to the times of presenting the morning and evening incense. These buildings for public worship were very much multiplied: at Jerusalem there were many hundreds of them; at Alexandria they were also prodigiously numerous; and there was scarcely a town, where any number of Jews resided, where there was not one or more. They were governed by a council of elders, over whom presided an officer, called the angel of the synagogue, whence the title of angel is supposed to be given in the Revelation to the presiding elder, or bishop, in the christian church.

In each synagogue a discipline was established for the support of purity of manners; and punishments were sometimes inflicted on notorious transgressors of the law. Thus we read of Saul, afterwards named Paul, scourging men and women in the synagogues.

These places of worship are supposed to have taken rise among the Jews, after the return from the Babylonish captivity: at least, we find no distinct traces of them before; though it was customary, even in the days of Elisha, to resort for instruction to the prophets, on the new moons and the sabbaths.

[Synagogues] were a most important appendage to the temple-worship, and a principal cause of preventing the Israelites from relapsing into idolatry, to which they were before so strongly addicted. Instead of assembling at Jerusalem three times a year, where no public instruction was delivered, but sacrifices and offerings only presented by the priest, the people, by means of synagogues, had an opportunity of listening to the writings of Moses

and the prophets every sabbath-day, the officiating ministers publicly harangued the people, and the persons who frequented the synagogue were united in religious society. While the temple-service was admirably adapted to preserve the union of the nation, and to prevent innovations in the public solemnities of religion, the synagogues were equally calculated for an increase of personal piety, and to perpetuate in the minds of the people the knowledge of revealed truth. After these were established, degenerate as the sons of Israel became, we never read of their relapsing into idolatry. The denunciations of the law were so often thundered in their ears, the calamities which their fathers had suffered for this offence were too familiar to their recollection, ever to allow them thus "to tempt the Lord to jealousy."

There is undoubtedly a great resemblance betwixt the edifices erected for christian worship amongst us, and those of the Jews. They appear to me to bear a much greater analogy to the synagogues than to the temple. The temple was a single building, which the Israelites were forbidden to multiply, it being designed to be a centre of union to the whole nation, as well as the immediate seat of the divine presence, which was confined to that spot: synagogues might be built at pleasure, and were spread over the whole land. The very idea of a temple is that of an immediate habitation of the Deity, who manifests himself there in a supernatural manner, or, at least, is believed so to do by his votaries. In the heathen temples, after they were duly consecrated, the gods, in whose honour they were erected, were supposed to take an immediate and preternatural possession of them. What was mere pretence or delusion among the heathen, was, at the temple of Jerusalem, an awful reality: the Lord visibly "dwelt betwixt the cherubim." In places set apart for christian worship, there were no such visible tokens of the presence of God. The manner of his presence is spiritual, not local; he dwells in the hearts of his worshippers. St. Stephen taught the Jewish nation, that it was one of the distinctions of the

christian dispensation, that the Highest no longer "dwelleth in temples made with hands." An altar, a sacrifice, and a priest, were the necessary appendages of the temple. But, among christians, we have no altar, [properly] so called, but the cross; no priest, but the Son of God, who remaineth "a priest for ever;" and no sacrifice, but the sacrifice "once offered for the sins of the world." The priestly office of Christ put an end to the typical priesthood of the sons of Aaron. It is an everlasting priesthood, and admits of no rival or substitute. In popular language, indeed, we give the appellation to that order of men who are set apart to minister in sacred things; and it is of no consequence, providing we recollect that it is but figurative language, not designed to be rigorously exact: for the apostolic definition of a priest, in the strict sense of the word, is one "taken from among men, and ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" In the temple-service, no provision was made for the regular instruction of the people in the principles of religion, beyond what the more serious attention might cull out from the typical import of its services, which were, indeed, "a shadow of good things to come," and obscurely pointed to the Saviour. It was erected as a place of national rendezvous, where God gave audience to the people as their temporal sovereign, and received their sin-offerings and peace-offerings, as acknowledgements of their offences and tokens of their allegiance. The ceremonial institution was then in the highest degree pompous and splendid. Synagogues were established, it has already been observed, for the worship of individuals, for the instruction of the people in religious principles, and for the exercise of prayer and devotion every sabbath, as well as on other suitable occasions. The mode of worship was plain and simple, and more corresponding to the genius of christianity.

To this we must add, that the platform of the church was framed, in a great measure, on the plan of the Jewish synagogues, as is generally acknowledged by the most learned men. The Scriptures were read and

interpreted in both, which was the origin of preaching; prayer was addressed to God in the name of the congregation; each was governed by a council of elders, over which one presided, which gave birth to the title of bishops; and irregularities of conduct, and errors in doctrine, were the subjects of censure and animadversion. Excommunication in the christian church was similar, in its effects, to an expulsion from the synagogue. So great was the resemblance betwixt christian assemblies and synagogues, that they are sometimes, in scripture, used as synonymous terms. "If there come into your assembly," says St. James, "a man with a gold ring, or goodly apparel:" in the original it is *synagogue.* We need not be surprised at that close analogy we have traced, when we reflect that the first converts to christianity were principally Jews, who, incorporating themselves into societies, adopted, as far as they were permitted by the Holy Ghost, the usages and forms to which they had so long been accustomed.

III. The passage which is the ground of this discourse represents the conduct of the centurion as highly praiseworthy and exemplary. "He is worthy," say the Jewish elders, "for whom thou shouldst do this; for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue."

To assist in the erection of places of worship, providing it proceed from right motives, is unquestionably an acceptable service to the Most High. Whatever extends his worship, in facilitating the means of it, is directly calculated to promote his glory and the salvation of men, with which the worship is inseparably connected. The service and worship of God is the very end of our creation; the perfection of it constitutes the glory of heaven; and its purity and spirituality, in whatever degree they subsist, are the chief ornaments of earth.

The increase of places dedicated to public worship ought surely to be no matter of lamentation or offence. They are rendered necessary by the increase of population. It is this which renders that accommodation quite inadequate at present, which was sufficient in former

times. The edifices devoted to the established religion in our country are plainly too few, and the accommodation afforded to the poor especially too scanty, were the people ever so well disposed, to accommodate all who might wish to resort to them. Were I to advance this on my own [authority], I am well aware it would be entitled to little weight. I must be allowed to corroborate it by the testimony of one of the most distinguished ornaments of the church of England, a clergyman, a man of elevated rank, of enlarged and profound observation, and of exalted piety,* who notices this evil in the following terms:—"Where are the poor in our large towns, where are the poor in the metropolis, to find room? One of the consequences obviously resulting from this deficiency, wherever it subsists, of accommodation in a parochial church for the poor, is this, that they are reduced to the alternative of frequenting no place of worship, or of uniting themselves with some of the methodists or dissenters. Every branch of the alternative has been adopted within my knowledge. That those who cannot obtain admittance into our places of worship should frequent the religious assemblies of some of our brethren in Christ who differ from us, ought to be a subject of thankfulness to ourselves. But are we justified in driving them from truth which we regard as simple, and as taught under very favourable circumstances, to truth, blended with error, or presented under circumstances of disadvantage?" The preference this writer finds for his own denomination is such as becomes every honest man; while the favourable opinion he avows of the designs of others does honour to his head and to his heart.

Till the legislature will exert itself, by adopting some effectual measures for the more extensive accommodation of the people in parochial churches, no enlightened friend of religion will complain of the supply of this deficiency by the exertions of persons out of the pale of the establishment. It is above all things necessary to the

* Mr. Hall here alludes to Dr. Ryder, the late excellent Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry.—Ed.

welfare of the state, to the salvation of souls, and the glory of God, that public worship should be supported and upheld: in what edifices, or with what forms, providing heresy and idolatry are excluded, is a consideration of inferior moment. We do not differ from our brethren in the establishment in essentials; we are not of two distinct religions: while we have conscientious objections to some things enjoined in their public service, we profess the same doctrines which they profess; we worship the same God; we look for salvation through the blood of the same Mediator; we implore the agency of the same blessed Spirit, by whom we all have access to the Father; we have the same rule of life; and maintain, equally with them, the necessity of that "holiness, without which none shall see the Lord."

The increasing demand for new places of worship, or for enlarging the old, arises, in great part, from the increased attention paid to the concerns of religion.

XXXIII.

ON THE REWARD OF THE PIOUS IN HEAVEN.

MATT. v. 12.—*Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.*

THE gospel of Christ is not intended to extinguish or impair the natural sensibility of the human mind; but to purify and refine it, rather, by directing it to its proper objects. It proposes to transfer the affections from earth to heaven,—from a world of shadows and illusions to a world where all is real, substantial, and eternal. By connecting the present with the future, by teaching us to consider every event in its relation to an hereafter, it presents almost every thing under a new aspect, and gives birth to such views of human life as, on a superficial observation, appear false and paradoxical. What can appear more so than to call upon men to "rejoice and be exceeding glad," when they are persecuted

and reproached, and loaded with every kind of calumny? Yet such, we find, is the language of that teacher, who, "coming from above, is above all."

Nor is there any difficulty in admitting the justness and propriety of the sentiment contained in this injunction, when it is added, "for great is your reward in heaven." A consummation so glorious throws a lustre over all the preparatory scenes, and turns into an occasion of joy and exultation that from which we should otherwise recoil with horror. We may reasonably be expected to welcome the short-lived pains which are to be followed by eternal pleasures, and those temporary reproaches which will be compensated with everlasting glory.

I. The felicity which awaits those who persevere through good and evil report, in a stedfast adherence to Christ, is frequently expressed in the Scriptures by the name of *reward.* It is almost unnecessary to remind you that this term is not on such occasions to be taken in its most strict and proper sense, as though the patience and perseverance of the saints *deserved* eternal felicity. Nothing is more opposed to the doctrine of scripture, and the feelings of a real christian, than such an idea. It is true, the inspired writers evince no reluctance to employ this term. Our Lord declares, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward; and whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, he shall in no wise lose his reward."* "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be called the children of the Highest."† St. Paul assures us, "Every man shall receive his own reward: if any man's work abide, he shall receive a reward."‡

* Matt. x. 41, 42. † Luke vi. 35.
‡ 1 Cor. iii. 8, 14.

"Let no man beguile you of your reward."* "Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."† "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be."‡ But still we must never lose sight of its true nature—that "it is of grace, not of debt." It is what the infinite condescension of God is pleased to bestow on those who love [him], not what any *man* claims as equitably due: for our best performances are mixed with sinful imperfections, which need themselves to be pardoned; not to say that the ability to perform them is the effect of renewing and sanctifying grace; so that while, in one sense they are our deeds, they are, in another, his donations.

The felicity which God will bestow upon his faithful servants, may be properly denominated *a reward*, on the following accounts.

1. It is inseparably joined to obedience, and is promised as a motive to encourage and sustain it Christ will be the "Author of eternal salvation to them," and them only, "who obey him."§

2. It will be bestowed expressly as a mark of approbation, and acceptance of the obedience to which it is annexed. It will be bestowed as a token and demonstration of God's complacency in righteousness. "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels."|| "And he said unto him, Well done, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities."¶

3. *The reward*, the felicity bestowed, will be proportioned to the degree of religious improvement, "to the work of faith and labour of love." We are reminded of those who are "saved as by fire;" and of those who have "an abundant entrance;" of "a righteous man's," and

* Col. ii. 18 † Matt. vi. 6. ‡ Rev. xxii. 12.
§ Heb. v. 9. || 2 Thess. i. 6, 7. ¶ Luke xix. 17.

of "a prophet's reward;" of some who "sow sparingly," and of others who "sow bountifully," both of whom shall reap accordingly.

II. Having said enough to establish the scripture idea of rewards, I proceed to the more immediate object in view, which is, by a comparison of both, to evince the superiority of heavenly to earthly rewards, of its recom penses to those of time.

1. The rewards of heaven are certain. Whether we shall possess them or not may be matter of great uncertainty, because it is possible we may not be of the description of persons to whom they are promised. The heirs of salvation may, at certain seasons, entertain doubts of their finally obtaining them; but they are in themselves certain, since they are secured by the "promise of Him who cannot lie."

On this account they are strikingly contrasted with earthly recompenses. The most passionate votary of the world is never certain he shall possess an adequate recompense for all his toil, and care, and earthly sacrifices. How often does she mock her followers with delusive hopes, entangle them in endless cares, and exhaust them with hopeless and consuming passions; and, after all, assign them no compensation. After years of unremitting fatigue and unceasing anxiety, the object they have pursued eludes their grasp, or appears as remote as ever, till, at the close of life, they are compelled to sit down in hopeless disappointment, and confess that they have "sown to the wind, and reaped the whirlwind." Of the many prizes which the world exhibits to human hope, there is not one whose possession is certain; nor is there a single desire with which she inspires her votaries but what is liable to become a source of anguish, by being disappointed of its gratification. Whatever be the immediate object of pursuit, success depends on circumstances quite out of our power; we are often as much injured by the folly of others as by our own. If the object which we are pursuing be highly desirable, others feel its attraction as well as ourselves; and we find ourselves engaged in a race where there are many competitors, but only one can gain the prize.

How different it is with heavenly rewards! In relation to them, no well-meant effort is unsuccessful. We lay up as much treasure there as we sincerely and perseveringly endeavour to accumulate; nor is the success of our efforts liable to be defeated by the jealousy of rivals.

Our attempts to promote the benefit of our fellow-creatures are estimated according to their events rather than their intentions; and, however sincere and zealous they may have been, unless they are productive of some probable benefit, they are treated with neglect and ingratitude.

How different, in regard to the recompenses of Heaven! He will reward, not only the services we have performed, but those which it was our wish to have performed. The sincere intention is recompensed as well as the deed. "Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee."* The friendship of mankind is sometimes as much endangered by the greatness of the benefit conferred as by neglect; and while little acts of attention and kindness cement the ties of friendship, such is the perverseness of human nature, that great favours weaken and dissolve them.

While they are sufficiently aware of the advantages that they derive, they hate the obligation which they entail; and, feeling themselves incapable of making an adequate return, they consult at once their pride and their indolence by forgetting it. But how different is it in relation to the Supreme Being: we can never lay Him under obligation; yet his kindness disposes, while his opulence enables him, to reward in the most liberal manner.

Many are so immersed in meanness and folly, that

* 2 Chron. i. 11.

they have little care but to be amused: the voice of truth and the admonitions of wisdom are discord to their ear; and he who desires to conciliate their regard must not attempt to do them good, but must soothe their pride, inflame their corruptions, and hasten on their destruction. They are of the temper of Ahab, the king of Israel, who caressed the false prophets that lured him on to his ruin, while he avowed his hatred of Micaiah, because he "prophesied evil of him and not good."*

The disinterested patriot, who devotes his nights and days to promote the interests of his country, may very probably fall a victim to its vengeance, by being made answerable for events beyond human foresight or control; and one unsuccessful undertaking shall cancel the remembrance of a series of the most brilliant achievements.

The most important services frequently fail of being rewarded when they are not recommended by their union with the ornamental appendages of rank or fortune. "There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man."† From these, and various other causes that might be specified, we see how uncertain are the recompenses of this world, and how delusive the expectations they excite, and to what cruel reverses and disappointments they are exposed.

How different the reward which awaits us in heaven; how infallibly certain the promise of him who cannot lie; how secure the treasure that is laid up in heaven, which "rust cannot corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal!" They are not liable to the fluctuations of time and chance, but are secured by the promise and the oath of God.

II. The recompenses of heaven are satisfying. How far this quality is from attaching to the emoluments and

* 1 Kings xxii. 8. † Eccles. ix. 14, 15.

pleasures of this world, universal experience can attest. They are so far from satisfying, that their effect uniformly is to inflame the desires which they fail to gratify.

The pursuit of riches is one of the most common and the most seductive which occupy the attention of mankind ; and, no doubt, they assume, at a distance, a most fascinating aspect. They flatter their votary with the expectation of real and substantial bliss : but no sooner has he attained the portion of opulence to which he aspired, than he feels himself as remote as ever from satisfaction. The same desire revives with fresh vigour ; his thirst for further acquisitions is more intense than ever ; what he before esteemed riches sinks, in his present estimation, to poverty ; and he transfers the name to ampler possessions and larger revenues. Say, did you ever find the votary of wealth who could sit down contented with his present acquisitions ? Nor is it otherwise with the desire of fame, or the love of power and preeminence.

The man of pleasure is still, if possible, under a greater incapacity of finding satisfaction. The violence of his desires renders him a continual prey to uneasiness ; imagination is continually suggesting new modes and possibilities of indulgence, which subject him to fresh agitation and disquiet. A long course of prosperity, a continued series of indulgences, produces at length a sickly sensibility, a childish impatience of the slightest disappointment or restraint. One desire ungratified is sufficient to mar every enjoyment, and to impair the relish for every other species of good. Witness Haman, who, after enumerating the various ingredients of a most brilliant fortune, adds, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the gate."*

The recompenses of the world are sometimes just, though they never satisfy ; hence the frequency of suicide. * * * * * *

III. The recompenses of heaven are eternal.

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* Esther v. 13.

XXXIV.

ON TAKING THE NAME OF GOD IN VAIN.

Exodus xx. 7.—*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.*

The laws given to the Israelites were of three kinds—ceremonial, judicial, and moral. The ceremonial consisted of those religious observances and rites which were partly intended to separate the peculiar people of God from surrounding nations, and partly to prefigure the most essential truths and blessings which were to be communicated to mankind at the advent of the Messiah. These, being in their [nature] typical, necessarily ceased when the great personage to whom they pointed made his appearance. The judicial laws respected the distribution of property, the rights of rulers and subjects, and the mode of deciding controversies, together with a variety of other particulars relating to civil polity, which is always of a variable and mutable nature. The third sort are moral: these are founded in the nature of things, and the reciprocal relations in which God and man stand towards each other, and are, consequently, unchangeable, since the principles on which they are founded are capable of no alteration. The two former sorts of laws are not obligatory upon christians; nor did they, while they were in force, oblige any besides the people to which they were originally addressed. They have waxed old, decayed, and passed away. But the third sort are still in force, and will remain the unalterable standard of right and wrong, and the rule throughout all [periods of time]. The Ten Commandments, or the "Ten Words," as the expression is in the original, uttered by God in an audible voice, from Mount Sinai, belong to the third class. They are a transcript of the law of nature, which prescribes the inherent and essential duties which spring from the relation which mankind bear to God and to each other. The first four respect the duty we owe to God, and the last six that which we

owe to our fellow-creatures. The first ascertains the object of worship; the second the mode of worship, forbidding all visible representations of the Deity by pictures or images; the third inculcates the reverence due to the divine name; the fourth, the observation of the sabbath, or of a seventh part of our time to be devoted to the immediate service of God. These ten rules, in order to mark their preeminent importance and obligation, were inscribed by the finger of God on two tables of stone, which Moses was commanded to prepare for that purpose.*

Our attention is, at present, directed to the third of these precepts—"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;" in treating of which we shall endeavour—

I. To determine what is forbidden in this commandment; and,

II. The grounds on which this prohibition proceeds.

I. In considering what is forbidden by the precept before us, it were easy to multiply particulars; but the true import of it may, if I am not mistaken, be summed up in the two following:—

1. It forbids perjury, or the taking up the name [of God] for the purpose of establishing falsehood. Vanity is frequently used in scripture for wickedness, and particularly for that species of wickedness which consists in falsehood; and after all that has been [advanced] on that famous saying of our Lord, "every *idle* word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement,"† it is most probable that he means by idle word, a word which is morally evil, partaking of the nature of falsehood, malice, pride, or impurity. It is in this [view] only, as it appears to me, that the truth of our Lord's saying can be soberly and consistently maintained. When the pretended prophets are threat-

* Nay, after Moses in his anger and grief at the idolatry of the Israelites, threw down and broke the first tables, Jehovah condescended to write these ten commandments a *second* time. See Exod. xxxi. 18; xxxiv. 4, 28. Deut. x. 1—4.—Ed.

† Matt. xii. 36.

ened on account of their uttering vain visions, the vanity ascribed to them meant their falsehood. In all civilized countries, recourse has been had to oaths, which are solemn appeals to God respecting a matter of fact for the determination of controversies which could not be decided without the attestation of the parties concerned, and of other competent witnesses. Hence an oath is said, by the apostle, to be "an end of all strife."* To take a false oath on such occasions, which is the crime of perjury, is one of the most atrocious violations of the law of nature and of God which can be committed, since it involves two crimes in one; being at once a deliberate insult to the majesty of God, and an act of the highest injustice towards our fellow-creatures.

A perjured person is, accordingly, branded with infamy, as well as subjected to severe punishment, which is equally demanded by the honour of God and the welfare of society. It may be reasonably hoped there is no person in this assembly who has been guilty of this crime, or is under any strong temptation to commit it. But I cannot omit this opportunity of expressing regret that the multiplication of oaths by the legislature, in the affairs of revenue and of commerce, has tended to render them too cheap, and has greatly diminished the horror with which the very idea of a false oath ought to be accompanied. Though it is always lawful to swear to a fact of which we are well assured, at the requisition of a magistrate or a public functionary; yet it deserves the attention of a christian legislator, whether the introduction [of oaths] on every the slightest occasion, can have any other tendency than to defeat the purpose, by rendering them of no authority; to say nothing of the blow which it strikes at the root of public morals.

If it was a complaint made by an ancient prophet, "By reason of swearing the land mourneth," we have assuredly not less reason to adopt the same complaint. Perjury, it is to be feared, is an epidemic vice in this nation. Among many it is reduced to a system: and,

* Heb. vi. 16.

awful to relate, there is, as I am credibly informed, a tribe of men who make it their business to take false oaths at the custom-house, for which they are paid a stated price. The name by which these wretched men are known is, it must be confessed, highly apposite; they are styled *damned souls.** But to proceed.

2. The second way in which this precept is violated, is the profane use of the name of God on trivial occasions; in familiar discourses, whether it be in mirth or in anger. There are some men who are in the constant habit of interlarding their common discourses with the name of God; generally in the form of swearing, at other times in the language of cursing and execration, without any assignable motive, except it be to give an air of superior spirit and energy to their language. The mention of the Deity is often so introduced as evidently to appear a mere expletive; nor is any thing more common than to hear such persons declare they absolutely mean nothing by it. When persons of this description are inflamed with anger, it is usual for them to express their resentment in the form of the most dreadful execrations, wishing the damnation of their fellow-creatures. There are multitudes who are scarce ever heard to make mention of the name of the Deity but upon such occasions.

To evince the criminality and impiety of this practice, let me request your serious attention to the following considerations:—

(1.) The practice of using the name of God on slight and trivial occasions is in direct opposition, not only to the passage [selected for our meditation], but also to a variety of others which identify the character of God with his name. He demands the same respect to be paid to his name as to himself. When the prophet Isaiah foretells the propagation of true religion, he ex-

* On Friday, the 15th of July, 1831, the Marquis of Lansdowne declared in the House of Peers, on introducing a bill for the regulation of oaths in certain government departments, that 10,000 oaths were taken in the department of the Customs, and 12,000 in that of the Excise, during the preceding year.—Ed.

presses it in the following terms:—"They shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel."* "I will sanctify my great name."† The piety of the tribe of Levi is thus expressed:—"My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before thy name?"‡ "I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."§ The respect which God pays to his name is a frequent plea with the saints of God in their supplications for mercy: "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?"|| "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, The Lord thy God."¶

When our Lord directs us to pray that all due reverence [be given to that name], he expresses it thus—"Hallowed be thy name." It is proper to remark, that as there were "gods many, and lords many," among the heathen, to distinguish himself from these pretended deities, he was pleased to reveal himself to Abraham and to his descendants under the peculiar name of JEHOVAH, which signifies essential, independent, and unchanging existence.** The reverence paid to this name amongst the Jews was carried to the greatest possible height: it was never pronounced in common, nor even read in their synagogues; but whenever it occurred in the Scriptures, the word Adonai was substituted in its place. Among christians, God has not been pleased to assume any appropriate appellation; but, as the existence of the pretended deities is entirely exploded, the term God invariably denotes the One Supreme. The meaning of it is no longer ambiguous, it always represents the true God; and whatever respect was justly due to the name of Jehovah amongst the Jews, is equally due to that term which is appropriated among christians to denote

* Isaiah xxix. 23. † Ezek. xxxvi. 23. ‡ Mal. ii. 5.
§ Mal. i. 14. || Josh. vii. 9. ¶ Deut. xxviii. 58.
** See pp. 109—113.

the existence and perfections of the same glorious Being. Hence it follows, that when we are taught to pray that the name of God may be hallowed, the meaning of that petition [is] that [the] appellation, whatever it be, by which the Supreme Being, in the various languages of the world, is denoted, may be duly reverenced. The term God among christians is no more ambiguous than the term Jehovah among the Jews; it denotes one and the same object: and it is, therefore, as criminal for us to use the one with levity, as a similar treatment of the other would have been amongst the Jews. And hence it is manifest that the whole spirit of the passages here quoted, respecting the name of God, is applicable in its full weight to the subject before us, and directly militates against the practice we are now condemning.

(2.) From the remarks which have been made, it follows, that the practice of using [his name] lightly, and [on] trivial occasions, is an infallible indication of irreverence towards God. As there is no [adequate] method of communicating [thought] but by words, which, though arbitrary in themselves, are agreed upon as the signs of ideas, no sooner are they employed but they call up the ideas they are intended to denote. When language is established, there exists a close and inseparable connexion between words and things, insomuch that we cannot pronounce or hear one without thinking of the other. Whenever the term God, for instance, is used, it excites among christians the idea of the incomprehensible Author of Nature: this idea it may excite with more or less force and impression, but it invariably excites this idea, and no other. Now, to connect the idea of God with what is most frivolous and ridiculous, is to treat it with contempt; and as we can only contemplate [objects] under their ideas, to feel no reverence for the idea of God is precisely the same thing as to feel a contempt for God. He who thinks of [the name of] God, without being awed by it, cannot pretend to be a fearer of God; but it is impossible to use the name of God lightly and unnecessarily without being in that predicament. It is evident, beyond all

contradiction, that such a man is in the habit of thinking of God without the least reverential emotion. He could not associate the idea of God with levity, buffoonery, and whatsoever is mean and ridiculous, if he had not acquired a most criminal insensibility to his character, and to all the awful peculiarities it involves. Suppose a person to be penetrated with a deep contrition for his sins, and a strong apprehension of the wrath of God, which is suspended over him ; and are you not [immediately] aware of the impossibility of his using the name of the Being who is the object of all these emotions as a mere expletive ? Were a person to pretend to the character of a humble penitent, and at the same time to take the name of God in vain, in the way to which we are now alluding ; would you give the smallest credit to his pretensions ? How decisive, then, must that indication of irreverence be, which is sufficient to render the very profession of repentance ridiculous !

But this practice is not only inconsistent with that branch of religion which [constitutes] repentance ; it is equally inconsistent with sincere, much more with supreme, esteem and veneration. No child could bear to hear the name of a father, whose memory he highly respected and venerated, treated in the manner in which the name of the Supreme Being is introduced. It would be felt and resented as a high degree of rudeness and indignity. There is, in short, no being whatever, who is the object of strong emotion, whose distinguishing appellations could be mentioned in this manner without the utmost absurdity and indelicacy. Nothing can be more certain than that the taking the name of God in vain infallibly indicates a mind in which the reverence of God has no place. But is it possible to conceive a state of mind more opposite to reason and order than this ? To acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being, our Maker and Preserver, possessed of incomprehensible perfections, on whom we are totally dependent throughout every moment of duration, and in every stage of our existence, without feeling the profoundest awe and reverence of him, is an impropriety, a moral

absurdity, which the utmost range of language and conception is inadequate to paint. If we consider the formal nature of sin as a deliberate transgression of the divine law, it resolves itself chiefly into this, that it implies a contempt of infinite majesty, and supreme power and authority. This disposition constitutes the very core and essence of sin. It is not merely the character of the wicked, that they contemn God; it enters deeply into the character of wickedness itself; nor is there a heavier charge, amongst their complicated crimes, adduced against the ancient Israelites, than that they "lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation."*

With respect to the profane oaths and execrations which most of those who are habituated to "take the name of God in vain" frequently utter, when they are transported with emotions of anger, their criminality is still greater, as they approach the confines of blasphemy. To hurl damnation at our fellow-creatures, whenever they have fallen under our displeasure, is precisely the conduct of the fool described by Solomon, who "casteth about firebrands, arrows, and death, and saith, Am not I in sport?"†

We will do them the justice of supposing that they are far from really wishing the eternal destruction of their fellow-creatures; but, admitting this to be the case, admitting they have no such intention, is not this more than to insinuate that these terms have absolutely no meaning, and that the sanction of the divine law, the punishment of a future state, have no such existence, but are become mere figures of speech; that christianity is exploded, and that its most awful doctrines, like the fables of pagan superstition, serve only the purpose of illusion? Is it possible for him who lives under an habitual conviction of there being an eternal state of misery reserved for the impenitent, to [advert to] the terrors of that world on every slight occasion, to give additional force to the expression of his anger?

(3.) The practice of taking the Lord's name in vain is

* Deut. xxxii. 15. † Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.

not only a great indication of want of reverence for God, but is calculated to wear out all serious religion from the mind. The effect of associating the most awful words, expressive of religious objects, with every thing which is mean and degrading, is adapted, in the highest degree, to sink them into contempt. He who has reflected the least on the laws of the human mind, must be aware of the importance of association, or of that principle, in consequence of which ideas and emotions, which have been frequently presented to the mind at the same time, naturally recall each other. It is by virtue of this law of nature, principally, that habits are formed, and that the links which connect things in the memory are constituted. By virtue of this it is that objects, which have been frequently presented along with ludicrous and ridiculous circumstances, acquire a character of ridicule. Hence the art of turning persons or things into ridicule is to place them in juxtaposition with what is low and trivial; in consequence of which the emotion of contempt excited by the latter is made to adhere to the former, and stamps them with a similar character. These remarks, obvious as they are, may be sufficient to evince the pernicious effect of taking the Lord's name in vain. Though it is not the formal design of those who indulge this practice to turn the most sacred objects into ridicule, it perfectly answers that purpose, as much as if it were their professed intention.

The practice [whose evils] we are endeavouring to [point out], will be more certainly productive of that effect, because it is usually connected with a total absence of the mention of God on all other occasions. Among this description of persons, the name and attributes of the Supreme Being, and the punishments of eternity, are rarely, if ever, introduced, but in the way of profanation.

If the most awful terms in religion are rarely or never employed but in connexion with angry or light emotions, he must be blind indeed who fails to perceive the tendency of such a practice to wear out all traces of seriousness from the mind. They who are guilty of it are

continually taking lessons of impiety; and their progress, it must be confessed, is proportioned to what might be expected.

(4.) The criminality of taking the Lord's name in vain is enhanced by the absence of every reasonable temptation. It is not, like many other vices, productive of either pleasure or emolument; it is neither adapted to gratify any natural appetite or passion, nor to facilitate the attainment of a single end which a reasonable creature can be supposed to have in view. It is properly the "superfluity of naughtiness," and can only be considered as a sort of peppercorn rent, in acknowledgement of the devil's right of superiority. It is a vice by which no man's reputation is extended, no man's fortune is increased, no man's sensual gratifications are augmented. If we attempt to analyze it, and reduce it to its real motive, we find ourselves at a total loss to discover any other than irreligious ostentation, a desire of convincing the world that its perpetrators are not under the restraint of religious fear. But as this motive is most impious and detestable, so the practice arising from it is not at all requisite for that purpose; since the persons who [persist in] it may safely leave it to other parts of their character to exonerate them from the suspicion of their being fearers of God. We beg leave to remind them that they are in no danger of being classed with the pious, either in this world or in that which is to come; and may therefore safely spare themselves the trouble of inscribing the name of their master on their foreheads. They are not so near to the kingdom of God as to be liable to be mistaken for its subjects.

XXXV.

ON THE ORIGIN AND IMPORT OF THE NAME, CHRISTIANS.

Acts xi. 26.—*And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

It is the glorious prerogative of God to bring good out of evil; and by the powerful superintendence of his providence, to overrule the most untoward events, and render them conducive to the ends of his glory and the good of his people.

The persecution which arose upon the death of Stephen affords a striking instance of this; whence the disciples being all scattered and dispersed, besides the apostles, went everywhere preaching the word; in consequence of which, the neighbouring districts and provinces were much sooner visited with the light of the gospel than they would have been but for that event.

Had the church of Jerusalem continued to enjoy [it] undisturbed, in that abundance of spiritual prosperity which attended it, and in the endearments of the most exalted friendship, they would in all likelihood have been indisposed to separate, and the precious *wheat* would have been accumulated in one spot. By the violence of persecution this happy society was broken up: the disciples found it necessary, according to the direction of their divine Master, to flee to other cities; where, inflamed with the desire of magnifying Christ, and of saving souls, they distributed the precious treasure of the gospel. Thus the clouds which the wind had scattered descended in rich and copious showers to refresh and render fruitful the earth: "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church that was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles: and they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."*

* Acts viii. 1, 4.

Among other places where the gospel was planted, on this occasion, was Antioch, a famous city built on the river Orontes, and the capital of Syria, where the kings of Syria, the successors of Alexander the Great, usually resided. This city must be carefully distinguished from Antioch in Pisidia, mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

The instruments chiefly employed in this work appear to have been men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they were come to this city for the first time, spoke to the Greeks, (that is, the pagan inhabitants of the city,) preaching the Lord Jesus. Much success crowned their labours; or, to speak in the language of the Holy Ghost, "The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

This is the first instance we meet with in sacred writ of the gospel being preached to the heathen. Though the apostles and evangelists had received from their Lord a commission for that purpose, it was some time before they fully comprehended its import, or attempted to execute it. By a special direction, Peter had, indeed, previous to this, communicated the gospel to Cornelius and his family; but no general attempt had hitherto been made to propagate christianity amongst idolaters.

Until this time, they who were dispersed from Jerusalem, in various parts, preached the gospel to Jews only. The introduction of the gospel into Antioch was, therefore, distinguished by the remarkable circumstance of its being the first instance in which the apostles' commission was executed to its due extent; and the treasures of divine truth were freely proposed to the acceptance of the Gentiles. It was here the light of the word first began to dawn on benighted pagans, and that the heathen began to be "given to Christ for his possession." The happy union of Jews and Gentiles in one church, and the breaking down of the middle wall of partition which had for ages divided them from each other, commenced here. That ancient oracle, in which it was foretold that "God would enlarge Japheth, and

that he should dwell in the tents of Shem,"* then began to receive its accomplishment. Those whom Jesus had made "fishers of men," and who had hitherto confined their labours to the scanty rivulets and shallow pools of one people, began now to "launch out into the deep," and to cast their net in the wide ocean.

When tidings of these things came to the ears of the church of Jerusalem, they were far from feeling emotions of envy. The holy apostles were strangers to any uneasy sensation on finding that event accomplished by meaner instruments, which they had neglected to attempt. They immediately "sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch; who, when he came and saw the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them, that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord." His character explains his conduct; for "he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith; and much people were added unto the Lord."

Not satisfied with contributing his own exertions to the formation of the work, he called in superior aid: he [went] to "Tarsus, to seek Saul; and when he had found him he brought him to Antioch." Thus this church, in addition to other extraordinary circumstances, had the honour of being one of the first scenes in which the great apostle of the Gentiles laboured. It was here he began to scatter those celestial sparks which soon after kindled a general conflagration in the world. "And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people." Then follows the circumstance on which we have founded this discourse: "And they were called christians first at Antioch."

I. As the appellation of "Christian" was unknown till this time, it is natural to inquire by what appellation they were distinguished previously. From the Scriptures, it appears there were various names by which the followers of Christ were characterized. Among themselves the most usual denomination was, Brethren. "And we came the next day to Puteoli, where we found brethren."†

* Gen. ix. 27. † Acts xxviii. 13, 14.

"If any man," saith St. Paul, "that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, with such an one no not to eat."* They were styled "believers:" "And believers were the more added to the Lord, both of men and women."† They were denominated "disciples:" "There went with us also certain of the disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge."‡ Their enemies, by way of contempt, styled them Nazarenes: thus, Tertullus accuses Paul of being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."§ Of similar import to this was the appellation of Galileans, and the terms *αἵρεσις*, or sect, meaning by that a body of men who had embraced a religion of their own, in opposition to that established by the law. And this appellation of Galileans was continued to be employed by the enemies of Christ as a term of reproach as late as the time of Julian, who reigned about the middle of the fourth century, and used it incessantly in his invectives against Christians. The followers of Christ were also styled "men of this way:"—"And I persecuted *this way* unto the death."||

II. Another question naturally here occurs—Was this name given by human or divine authority? On this the Scriptures offer no certain information, nor can any thing be affirmed with confidence. It is not at all probable an appellation so inoffensive, and even so honourable, originated with their enemies; they would have invented one that was more opprobrious. But supposing it to have been assumed first by the disciples themselves, we can scarcely suppose they would have ventured to take a step so important as that of assuming an appellation by which the church was to be distinguished in all ages, without divine direction; especially at a time when the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were so common, and in a church where prophets abounded. For "there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had

* 1 Cor. v. 11. † Acts v. 14 ‡ Acts xxi. 16.
§ Acts xxiv. 5. || Acts xxii. 4.

been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul"* Is it to be supposed that they would assume a new appellation without recourse to the prophets for that direction; or that, supposing it to have had no other than a human origin, it would have been so soon and so unanimously adopted by every part of the christian church? This opinion receives some countenance from the word here used, which is not in any other instance applied to the giving a name by human authority. In its genuine import, it bears some relation to an oracle.† Names, as they are calculated to give just or false representations of the nature of things, are of considerable importance; so that the affixing one to discriminate the followers of Christ, in every period of time, seems to have been not unworthy of divine interposition.

III. The next inquiry which arises on this subject respects the propriety and import of this name.

1. Of its propriety no doubt can be entertained. It has always been usual in the schools of philosophy, and in the sects arising out of a difference of opinion in religion, to give to the partizans the name of the founder. Thus the Platonists were so styled from Plato, the Pythagoreans from Pythagoras, the Aristotelians from Aristotle, the Sadduceans from Zadoc. The propriety of the followers of Christ taking their name from him was still more striking. The respective leaders we have mentioned merely communicated their opinions to their followers; and after they quitted the present [state], had no further influence over them; the conviction ceased for ever. It is far otherwise with the disciples of Christ: he is now as much as ever their living head; he lives in them, and they live by him. To them he stands in the same relation as the natural head to the members. It is not a civil, but a vital—not a temporary, but a perpetual and eternal, union, which subsists

* Acts xiii. 1.

† *Benson, Doddridge,* and others, think that the word χρηματίσαι, implies that it was done *by a divine direction.* But *Parkhurst* is of opinion that the passages quoted by Doddridge do not bear him out in his interpretation.—Ed.

betwixt Christ and his followers. By a sacred and mysterious influence, he imparts his very image to his disciples; and it is surely fit they should receive their name from him from whom they have derived their nature.

In bestowing the appellation of Christians on the disciples of Christ, God may be considered as fulfilling that gracious declaration, "Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name;"* "The Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name."†

It soon began to prevail to the exclusion of every other. When Peter wrote his first epistle, it seems to have been in familiar use: "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."‡ St. James styles it "that worthy name;" it is truly a most excellent and honourable appellation: "Do they not blaspheme that worthy name, by which ye are called?"§ In the times of persecution, the only question asked of such as were arraigned at the tribunal of the magistrate was, "Are you a Christian?" To answer this in the affirmative was looked upon as in every way to justify the proceeding to the utmost extremities. And in the midst of the sharpest torments, the martyrs found a relief and refreshment in repeating at each pause of agony, "I am a Christian."

2. The proper import of this name is, a follower of Christ: it denotes one, who from mature deliberation and an unbiassed mind, embraces the religion of Christ, receives his doctrine, believes his promises, and makes it his chief habitual care to shape his life by his precepts and example.

The christian and the man of the world are diametrically opposite characters; since it is a chief part of our Saviour's design, and the great scope of his religion, to redeem us from the present evil world.

The christian is one who professes to have attained such a practical knowledge of Christ as engages him to walk even as he walked. The rules by which he lives are the words of Christ; his example is the model after

* Isa. lxii. 2. † Isa. lxv. 15.
‡ 1 Pet. iv. 16. § James ii. 7.

which he copies; the happiness he aspires to is that of being for ever with the Lord.

Here it is too apparent that multitudes assume the name of christian, to whom it is, in strict propriety, utterly inapplicable. Educated in a country were Christianity is the established religion, they acquiesce in its truth, or, perhaps, never thought the inquiry, whether it were true or not, of sufficient importance to engage their attention. But, to whatever distinguishes the real christian—his faith, his hope, his charity; to whatever relates to a spiritual union with Christ—faith in his sacrifice, delight in his person, or an animating hope of his appearance, they remain total and contented strangers. They have neither any share in these things, nor are dissatisfied at the consciousness of not possessing them. They feel no scruple in associating the name of Christ with many, perhaps, of the vices, and with all the spirit of the world. This assumption of the name of Christ, without aspiring to the least resemblance to his character, has done incalculable injury to the interest of religion. To this, more than to any other cause, we must ascribe the little progress vital christianity has made in the world. It is [this] that emboldens the scoffer, encourages the infidel, the profligate, the votaries of paganism, and seals the eyes of the impenitent in every nation in deeper and more death-like slumber: "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written."* The time is coming when the Lord Jesus will vindicate the honour of that name which wicked men have disgraced. It had been better for them not to have named the name of Christ, than, having named it, not to depart from all evil.

IV. Let me take occasion from these words to urge you to become christians in reality and truth. The name, without the reality, will only augment your guilt and aggravate your doom; but the possession of genuine religion will add unspeakably to your happiness, both here, and hereafter. To be a partaker of Christ is to be at

* Rom. ii. 24.

peace with God; to have peace of conscience, to possess a beneficial interest in all things, and an assured hope of life everlasting. He came that you might have life, and more than life. He came to give rest to your souls, to afford you strong consolation under the sorrows of the world, support in the hour of death, and an entrance, when your mortal course is ended, into the glory to be revealed. He is ready to vanquish your spiritual enemies for you, to cleanse you from all impurities, purge you from all your guilt, and make you "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." While the bare profession of christianity will bestow neither profit nor delight, the possession of it in reality will be replete with both, and will afford the "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."* It will deliver you from a thousand snares against which there is no other relief; emancipate you from the bondage of a multitude of degrading passions, and invest you with the "glorious liberty of the children of God." However lightly you may esteem it now, be assured that the moment is coming when, to belong to Christ, to be in union with him, will be felt to be a greater happiness than to be master of the world. Every other honour will fade; every other distinction will pass away; every other enjoyment be exhausted; while the crown of righteousness which Christ will give to his sincere followers will shine with undecaying brightness through the ages of eternity. Let the young be persuaded it will add unspeakable grace to the charms of youth; temper its vivacity with wisdom, tincture its passions with innocence, and form it for a happy, useful, and honourable life. It will be an ornament to youth, a safe directory in the active pursuits of life, a staff and a consolation amidst the decays and infirmities of age. To see you set out in the ways of Christ will afford the highest satisfaction to the church of God; the most exalted pleasure to your parents, who watch every movement of your mind with parental solicitude, ready to rejoice over you with transport when they

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

can say of any of you, as it was said of Saul, "Behold, he prayeth."

V. We cannot but look back with regret to the period when the followers of Christ were known by no other name. Happy period; when, instead of being rent into a thousand parts, and split into innumerable divisions, the church of Christ was "one fold under one Shepherd!" The seamless coat of the Redeemer was of one entire piece from the top to the bottom. The world was divided into two grand parties—christians and pagans. This happy state, we have no doubt, will occur again: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord."*

In consequence of a more copious communication of the Spirit, some of our differences of opinion will be removed, and "the shepherds will see eye to eye," and others of them will be lost in the indulgence of christian charity, in the noble oblivion of love.

In the mean time, if party names must subsist, let us carefully watch against a party spirit; let us direct our chief attention to what constitutes a christian, and learn to prize most highly those great truths in which all good men are agreed. In a settled persuasion, that what is disputed or obscure in the system of christianity is, in that proportion, of little importance, compared to those fundamental truths which are inscribed on the page of revelation as with a sunbeam; whenever we see a christian, let us esteem, let us love him; and though he be weak in faith, receive him, "not to doubtful disputation."

* Isaiah xi. 6, 8, 9.

XXXVI.

ON LOVE OF THE BRETHREN, AS A CRITERION OF A STATE OF SALVATION

1 JOHN iii. 14.—*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*

As it is an inquiry of the highest moment whether we are in a state of acceptance with God, or under condemnation, we ought carefully to attend to the marks and criterions by which these two opposite states are distinguished in the word of God. The scripture abounds with directions on this subject; so that if we remain in an habitual state of suspense and uncertainty, it is not to be ascribed to deficiency of light in the sacred oracles, but must be imputed, for the most part at least, to the want of strict and impartial inquiry. Too many professors of christianity content themselves without attaining a satisfactory evidence of their real character in the sight of God; hoping all is well, without resting on sure and solid grounds: by which, if their religion is really vain, they incur the charge of presumption; and, if it is genuine, deprive themselves of the richest source of comfort, as well as of motives to the most ardent gratitude. For how is it possible to praise God for a favour which we are not certain we have received? Or if a feeble hope is entitled to devout acknowledgement, our praises must be faint and languid in proportion to the mixture of darkness and uncertainty which attends it. We are exhorted to give all diligence, that we may obtain the full assurance of hope: we should never read in the writings of this eminent apostle the rapturous exclamation, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God,"* had he been in that state of suspense respecting his prospects for eternity, in which too many christians allow themselves to remain.

* 1 John iii. 1.

With a view to assist the professors of the gospel, in their attempts to ascertain their real condition, we request your serious attention while we endeavour to explain and illustrate the criterion of character the apostle suggests in the text: "Hereby we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

Death and life are the two extremes set before us; spiritual death, and spiritual life: for in this sense, it is obvious, the words must be understood. When the apostle speaks of our *passing* from death unto life, the phraseology necessarily implies that death is our natural state as sinners; and, consequently, that he who is perfectly conscious of his having experienced no change, is under no necessity of inquiring farther: he infallibly abideth in death. "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death"* A transition from one state to another is supposed in every case where there is a well-founded hope of salvation; and the design of the apostle, in the words before us, is to suggest an infallible criterion of the reality of such a transition.

When he speaks of love to the brethren, we must understand him to mean love to real christians, who are frequently, in the New Testament, distinguished by this appellation: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."† In reproving the Corinthians for their contentious spirit, St. Paul used this language: "Brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren."‡ In this passage, it is manifest that the term brethren is equivalent to christian, and that it is employed in contradistinction to unbelievers. When the apostle lays down love to real christians, as an infallible sign and token of a justified state, he cannot be supposed to include every sort of attachment which may be felt towards them, from whatever principles or on whatever

* 1 John iii. 14. † 1 John iii. 16. ‡ 1 Cor. vi. 6—8.

occasion it arises. No doubt can be entertained that there are circumstances in which the genuine disciples of Christ may be objects of love, without its furnishing the least evidence of a religious character. Religion may have no sort of concern in it. Parents may love their children, children their parents, husbands their wives, and wives their husbands, whatever be the religious character of the party beloved, upon principles merely natural. The natural affections and desires, by which society is cemented, and mankind are bound to each other, can afford, it is evident, no test or criterion of religious principle.

True christians may possess certain qualities, which, according to the principles of human nature, are calculated to command a portion of esteem and affection; such as prudence, generosity, kindness, and fidelity: to which nothing but a brutish insensibility can render men entirely [indifferent]. There are certain social and moral virtues which are so useful to the world, and so attractive in themselves, as to be the natural objects of partiality; and these christianity will improve, rather than impair. We may proceed a step farther, and add, that a christian may be even indebted to his religion for certain qualities which excite attachment, and yet that attachment shall afford no proof of the religious character of him who feels it: "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness."* This goodness, this genuine benevolence of christian deportment, has its charms; and, on a variety of occasions, may excite esteem in persons who have no regard to the principle from whence it flows. "Demetrius had good report of all men, and of the truth itself."† When St. Paul had been inculcating certain christian graces, he adds, He that hath these things "is acceptable to God and approved of men."‡ If we find ourselves overpowered, as it were, and captivated by the display of christian virtue, we are not hence entitled immediately to draw a favourable conclusion respecting our state, without looking deeper, and inquring how we

* Ephes. v. 9. † 3 John 12. ‡ Rom. xiv. 18.

stand affected towards the *principle* whence those virtues emanated.

This leads us to observe, that it is the ground on which our attachment to a christian is founded that can alone afford a favourable decision in this matter. Do we love the brethren *as* brethren, christians *as* christians, on account of the relation they bear to their heavenly Father, and on account of their union to Christ? In any specific case, when we feel warmly attached to a christian, is it founded on this consideration, that he is a christian, a follower of the holy and immaculate Lamb of God? If we can answer this question in the affirmative, St. John authorizes us in deeming it an infallible evidence of our having passed from death unto life. It affords such an evidence in two ways :—

I. Negatively, it proves that we are not of the world.

II. Positively, it demonstrates that we are of God.

I. It proves that we are not of the world: for the world is entirely destitute of an attachment to the disciples of Christ as such. At no period did the world appear favourably disposed to the disciples of Christ as such, or on account of their relation to this their divine Head. Our Lord repeatedly warned his followers to expect just the contrary: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake."* "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."† "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."‡

The course of events, from that to the present time, has verified the truth of the Saviour's declaration: "They were hated of all men for his name's sake;" they were "persecuted from city to city,"§ and even the most eminent among them accounted as "the offscouring of all things."|| In every subsequent age, and in every country, the true disciples of Christ have encountered

* Matt. x. 22. † John xv. 19. ‡ John xvii. 14.
§ Matt. xxiii. 34. || 1 Cor. iv. 13.

opposition, which has been almost invariably more or less violent in proportion to their attachment to the Saviour, to the purity of their faith, and the lustre of their piety. Look at the world at present; view it in this highly favoured nation, furnished as it is with wholesome laws, and restrained from open persecution: Do you perceive the world to evince a predilection for the serious and earnest followers of Christ? Is decided christian piety, conspicuous in the character of any, a passport to distinction and favour? On the contrary: Will a man be better received in worldly circles for being supposed to resemble Christ? No. We can be at no loss to answer these questions, or avoid perceiving that the world continues invariably consistent with itself in "loving its own,"* and none but its own. If, in any instance, its affections stray beyond its own circle; if, in any instance, it extends its favourable regards to a real christian; it is never on account of his being a christian, it is never, as St. John expresses it, "for the truth's sake, which dwelleth in him."† Since this is an unquestionable fact, that the world is thus unfavourably disposed towards serious christians; if it be otherwise with us, it proves that we are "not of the world;"‡ or, in other words, that we have "passed from death unto life."

II. The love of the brethren, as such, affords a positive proof of our being of God.

This will appear in a clearer light, if we consider the grounds on which love to christians proceeds:—

1. To love christians, *as such*, is to love them on account of their relation to God and the Redeemer.

2. On account of their attachment to both.

3. On account of the resemblance which they bear to these divine persons.

1. He who loves christians as such, is attached to them on account of their relation to God. The Supreme Being stands in a peculiar relation to christians, as their God: He is their "covenant God and Father through

* John xv. 19. † 2 John 2. ‡ John xv. 19.

Christ Jesus." They are, emphatically, a peculiar treasure to him, above all the nations of the earth. They are his possession, his inheritance, his people. In every age there have been a people in whom the blessed God claimed a peculiar interest, on whom he fixed his special love, and manifested himself unto them as he does not to the world; a people who were "the temple of God,"* the seat of his special presence, among whom he walked and dwelt. Under the christian dispensation true christians compose this people. In whatever interesting and endearing relation God stood to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; he stands in that same relation to the sincere followers of Christ. They are the objects of that special love, of which the Saviour speaks in these words: "For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God."† To feel attached to christians, on this account, is a proof of a heart well affected towards the Supreme Being, reconciled to his requirements and government: and as "the carnal mind is enmity against God,"‡ it affords an evidence that this enmity is subdued. If we feel favourably towards the domestics of a family, on account of their relation to their master, it is an evidence of affection to the master himself; it is a fruit of it. The relation which christians bear to the Redeemer is still more intimate and endearing: they are the people that were given him to redeem before the world [began]; they are the children for whose sake he took flesh and blood; they are his pupils, his household, and family; nay, more, his spiritual spouse and the members of his mystical body. The love of the brethren contemplates them in that light, and consequently evinces a heart well affected towards their Lord and head. To give "a cup of water in the name of a disciple,"§ shall not lose its reward.

2. On account of their attachment to God, and their zeal for the interest of his glory. This is so essential a

* 1 Cor. iii. 16. † John xvi 27.
‡ Rom. viii. 7. § Matt. x. 42.

part of the christian character, that it cannot be separated from the grounds and reasons of a rational regard for christians, unless we are supposed to be ruled by a blind and unthinking impulse. Our esteem for good men will be intimately blended with the consideration of their being on God's side. While the rest of the world continue in a state of enmity and alienation, we must look upon these as reconciled, as persons who have given a cordial and respectful reception to his ambassadors, and have renewed their alliance, or rather, made their submission, upon the gracious terms he was pleased to propose. "You, that were enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death."* And being reconciled, they are employed to manage his interests, to maintain his honour, and to propagate, as far as possible, the sentiments of loyal obedience by which they themselves are actuated. These views enter deeply into the christian character and calling. How can we give a more unequivocal evidence of a loyal and affectionate disposition towards the prince than by abetting his, in opposition to the disaffected party? As the case will not admit of neutrality—as he, in such a situation, who is not *for* the prince is necessarily looked upon as a rebel, so a cordial attachment to his interests cannot be more decisively expressed than by a determined [adherence] to those who cheerfully submit to his authority, and delight in his government. "He that knoweth God heareth us."†

3. True christians are distinguished by some peculiar traits of resemblance to God and the Redeemer; and this enters into the grounds of that regard for them which the apostle speaks of in the text. They not only adore the divine nature, but are in some degree partakers of it; not only "behold in a glass the glory of the Lord, but are changed into the same image from glory to glory."‡ Their character makes a very distant, it is confessed, but yet a real approach, to the absolute rectitude of the divine, which they [constantly] study and

* Coloss. i. 21, 22 † 1 John iv. 6. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

imitate, [until] they are presented before him unblamable in holiness. In regeneration, some traces of the paternal image are impressed; and with that strange, that more than natural affection it becomes them to feel towards such a parent, they become "followers of God, as dear children."* If they profess to have fellowship with God, they evince that profession to be no empty boast, by walking in the light as he who is in the light. If they profess to know Christ, to have a sacred intimacy with him, they justify the pretension, in some good degree, by walking as he also walked, by doing righteousness as he also did.

To feel an attachment to christians on this account, is an unequivocal proof of a love of rectitude, a love of God, an attachment to those great moral properties in which the true beauty of the divine character consists.

Close with three remarks.

I. The criterion supplied in the text may be inverted. If we do *not* love Christ, other love will discover itself by the choice of our society.

II. It is not only a safe, but a useful criterion suggested in the text, which may be applied to great advantage. We may see the sun through the water when we cannot look upon it in its place in the heavens.

III. It should be our care to improve in this part of the christian character, to abound therein more and more.

Love is the characteristic of the christian.

XXXVII.

ON THE DUTY OF INTERCESSION.

1 Tim. ii. 1.—*I exhort, therefore, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.*

I. Duty.

1. The reasons and obligations of prayer arise out of

* Ephes. v. 1.

the fundamental principles of religion—the belief that there is a God, and that he is "the rewarder of such as diligently seek him." The duty of intercession, or praying for others, springs from the relation we stand in to our fellow-creatures. As the former is an essential part of piety, so the latter is a branch of benevolence, not less essential. To love our neighbour as ourselves is the fulfilment of the second table of the law. Unless we believe in the efficacy of prayer, we have no pretensions to the character of christians; but if we are convinced that the prayer of the righteous avails, we have no right to withhold from those we ourselves are bound to love this advantage, especially as it is a benefit which it is always in our power to confer without loss or detriment to ourselves. In almost every other instance, the favour we confer seems at least to come into competition with the claims of self-interest; but in this there is no possible interference or intrusion.

Here only are we able fitly to imitate the Supreme Being, who imparts to all without diminishing his own store. The duty of intercession is also recommended and enforced by this important consideration, that it opens a channel in which the benevolence of every individual may flow. To afford pecuniary relief is the privilege of the rich; to guide the counciis of a nation, of the wise; to ensure victory by arms, of the powerful: but the most obscure person may intercede, and by this means promote the welfare of millions, and affect the destiny of nations.

2. That we are [led] to infer this duty from the general principles of reason and religion. It is implied in the social form of the prayer taught by our Lord, where we are commanded to address God as *our* Father. It is expressly enjoined by apostolic authority, in the passage now under consideration. It is also a duty exemplified by the practice of the most eminent saints. Abraham interceded for Sodom, Job for his friends, Moses for the people of Israel, Samuel for Saul, &c. Intercession formed a principal branch of the priestly function of the law. Our great High-Priest spent some

of the most precious moments, near the end of his earthly course, in interceding with his Father, not only on behalf of his disciples, but of all who should "afterwards believe on his name."

The apostle assures us, it is by virtue of his continued intercession in heaven that he is "able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him;" so that in his hands it is the refuge of the guilty, the hope of the perishing, a mysterious chain fastened to the throne of God, the stay and support of a sinking world.

II. The benefits of intercession; which may be considered in two lights: as they respect ourselves, and as they regard others.

1. As they respect ourselves.

(1.) It will have a happy tendency to increase our benevolence. As the love of God and of man make up the whole of religion, so there is nothing more likely to promote the love of our fellow-creatures than the bearing them in our minds before the throne of grace. How can we fail to feel concern for the happiness of those for whom we pray?

Either our petitions must be full of hypocrisy, or our good wishes to them must be hearty and sincere. To pray for their welfare, and yet be indifferent, would constitute the grossest dissimulation. In venturing to address the Supreme Being in their behalf, we assume the character of advocates. To be indifferent to their welfare, is to belie the character and betray our trust. That criminal self-love, which is the great reproach of our nature, is grown to such a height, principally in consequence of our habitual inattention to the situation of others. We contemplate ourselves, and our own circumstances, till we almost forget there are any other beings in the world. When we can be prevailed upon to step out of this narrow circle, and look at the distresses and anxieties which those around us have to encounter, a generous compassion is excited, the tenderness of nature is touched, and our own troubles appear light and inconsiderable. Most of our vices, my brethren, may be traced to a want of reflection. And what is

the best remedy for this thoughtlessness and vanity, as far as it respects our duty to others? Intercession.

In solemn intercession with God, the misery, the helplessness, and dependence of our fellow-mortals, or rather of our fellow-immortals, rise in view with all their affecting peculiarities; at those moments when the mind is the most calm, tender, and elevated, at those moments when none but God can enter, when we feel our own nothingness before Him who is all in all. When we have been "spreading before the Lord" the circumstances of an orphan who has no friend, of a widow who has no protector, of an unhappy man who is under the dominion of lusts which are hurrying him fast to eternal destruction; is it possible to rise from our knees without feeling sentiments the most noble, tender, and disinterested; without feeling, in some measure, what Paul felt when he said, "Who is weak and I am not weak; who is offended and I burn not?"

Is it possible to return immediately into ourselves, and to behave with unfeeling insolence, as though the world were made for us; instead of remembering that we are a small part of an immense whole, an inconsiderable member of a vast family.

As we are concerned to employ prayer and intercession for all men, that narrowness of mind which confines our solicitude to a small circle instead of all within our reach, universal good or ill, will be the most effectually promoted or remedied.

If we comply, in any tolerable measure, with this apostolic injunction, by offering solemn prayer for the happiness of the world and the prosperity of the church, for the conversion of the heathen and the salvation of the whole earth, in proportion as our thoughts diffuse themselves, our hearts will necessarily become enlarged.

(2.) It will be the best antidote against all angry and malignant passions.

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2. We may consider the benefit of intercession as it respects others.

There is a remarkable passage in Ezekiel xiv. 14: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God."

From this passage we may infer two things:—First, That there are seasons when even the intercession of the most eminent will not avail; seasons in which it is unalterably determined to inflict punishment. Secondly, we may infer, that these are so rare and so extraordinary, that to declare he will not turn away for intercession, is the strongest token of his fierce indignation.

(1.) If God delights to hear prayer, it is most reasonable to believe he will favourably regard intercessory prayer; for then the supplicant is exercising two most important virtues at once, piety and benevolence. He is then employed in fulfilling the whole law, and makes the nearest approach to the divine nature.

(2.) Examples of its success;—Abraham, Moses, and Job.

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III. General objects of intercession.

1. Our civil governors. We are under the strongest obligations to this, on account of the inestimable benefits involved in good government, which, like the natural health of the body, is indispensably necessary to our happiness, yet is scarcely perceived till it be interrupted. We, of this country, are under peculiar obligations to this duty.

2. The church, "the mother of us all," from whom we are born, at whose breasts we have been nourished with the "sincere milk of the word." "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name."*

* Isaiah lxii. 1, 2.

Let us pray for its extension, for its peace, for its purity, for the accomplishment of all the promises made to it.

3. The distressed of every description have peculiar claims to our prayers. Indigent christians, who ever appear to be in a peculiar manner the objects of compassion, will share in our petitions to a throne of grace. To pray for others is the best salve and relief of powerless benevolence. For where can we turn our eyes without seeing persons misled by error and delusion which we wish in vain to arrest; made wretched by vices which we cannot reform; or oppressed with misery it is out of our power to avert? Must it not, in such circumstances, furnish the greatest incitement to go into the presence of that Being in whom it is infinite mercy to heal the maladies of mind and body, and to do "for us, and for all men, above all we can ask or think?" When we have thus commended the case of our distressed fellow-creatures to the divine notice—when we have thus committed them, as it were, into the arms of our heavenly Father—we feel calm: our compassion grows softer, while it loses its anxiety; and our benevolence, like his, becomes strong and glowing, without solicitude.

4. Our friends and relatives.

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Application.

XXXVIII.

GOD'S ETERNITY CONSIDERED, IN REFERENCE TO THE SUSPENSION OF HIS PROMISED PURPOSES.

2 Pet. iii. 8.—*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**

That spirit of prophecy with which the holy apostles

* Preached at Leicester, Sunday, January 6th, 1811: the first Sunday in the new year.

were endowed, enabled them to foretell the principal defections from the christian faith which should distinguish the last days,—the papal superstition and infidel impiety.

We have long witnessed the fulfilment of both these predictions: the gross idolatry, cruel edicts, and tyrannical claims of the church of Rome, have been for ages promulgated; and now that superstition appears to be in its dotage, and falling fast into decay, a new progeny has arisen—a scoffing, infidel spirit.

They founded their disbelief of Christ's coming to destroy the world, to judge the wicked, and to reward his servants, on the pretended uniformity of the course of nature. No event which bears any resemblance to that which the gospel foretells, they pretend, has ever taken place. In affirming this, the apostle charges them with "wilful ignorance" [of the destruction of the world by water.]

He then proceeds to declare that the heavens, which at present subsist, are reserved for a similar catastrophe, and are doomed to undergo a more signal overthrow. Nor can any argument be deduced against the certain accomplishment of the divine declaration, from the seeming length of the time during which their execution is delayed: since "one day is with God as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

In attempting to improve these words, we shall,

I. Endeavour to illustrate their import, and establish the truth of the proposition which they contain.

II. Show to what particular uses the truth which they exhibit may be applied.

I. Let us attempt to illustrate the assertion, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

It is necessary, in order to enter into the sense and meaning of the apostle in these words, to consider on what occasion they are introduced.

They are designed as an answer to the objections which irreligious scoffers advance against the certainty of the accomplishment of the divine declarations, founded

on its long delay. Impatient and short-sighted mortals are apt to suppose that what is delayed long will never take place; that an event, placed at the distance of many ages, will never arrive; that an evil which has been long apprehended, but through a series of ages has never actually taken place, need be dreaded no more, but may be safely classed among the phantoms of a vain terror.

In reply to this, the apostle states that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years;" and that long and short, when applied to a part of duration, are not the same in his apprehension as ours; that what appears a long time to us, does not appear so to him, whose estimate is so different, and whose views are so much more extended. A thousand years seem to us a very long period, but in his eyes appear extremely short; they are but as a day.

This idea of the different apprehension which God has of time from what we possess, is exhibited in several passages of scriptures: "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night."* To the same purpose spake the royal Psalmist, in the 39th Psalm: "Make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee."†

1. Every portion of duration is something real, and has a true and proper existence; but the epithets great and small, when applied to this, (as well as to any thing else,) are merely comparative. They necessarily imply a comparison of one quantity with another, without which they can never be applied with justice; for what is great compared with one quantity, becomes, at the same moment, little when compared with another, and *vice versâ*.

Thus fourscore years are, at present considered as a great age; but would not have been called so before the [general deluge]. That age is now styled great with

* Psalm xc. 4. † Psalm xxxix 4, 5.

propriety, because it is so, compared with the usual term of life, which is considerably less; and, for an opposite reason, it would, before the Flood, have been styled small, because it would have been so compared with the average term of human life, at that period, which was much greater. We should consider fifty years as forming a very large portion of human life; but the same number of years in the history of an empire would be justly considered small. Thus is the same quantity either great or small, as you place it by the side of something much inferior to it in magnitude, or much superior.

2. Hence it results that absolute greatness belongs only to what is infinite; for whatever falls short of this, however great it may appear, its supposed greatness is entirely owing to the incidental absence of another object that is greater. It may be, it will be, infallibly, reduced to insignificance, the moment it comes into comparison with that which is so prodigiously superior to it.

3. In duration, absolute greatness belongs only to eternity. The epithet great, or whatever other is most expressive of the profoundest astonishment, is, with the utmost propriety, applied to that unfathomable abyss. Incapable of being placed in any light, or brought, even by imagination, into any comparison which should reduce it to insignificance, it asserts its preeminence, and vindicates its majesty, in all places and [times], in all the possible varieties of being, or combinations of thought.

4. We must then conceive that he who has subsisted throughout eternal ages; who knows no "beginning of days, nor end of years;" who possesses eternity; to whom all its parts (if we may be allowed so to speak) are continually open, both past and future; must have a very different apprehension of that inconsiderable portion of it we call time, from creatures who are acquainted with no other. His apprehension, we may easily conceive, will be, in this respect, very different; and that what to us appears a large portion, will, in his eyes, appear very inconsiderable.

Nor let any one here object, and say, it must appear

as it is, and, therefore, there is no reason to suppose it appears to him different from what it does to us. No doubt it appears to him exactly as it is. His apprehensions are, unquestionably, agreeable to the nature of things; but it does not follow from thence that it must appear in the same light as it does to us: and if there may be a difference it is surely the highest presumption to make ourselves the standard.

That each portion of duration appears to him real, we admit: we are not contending for its being annihilated in his view. Something it is, and something it appears, unquestionably, in his eyes, who views things as they are; but this is far from proving that a limited portion of duration must appear to him of the same precise magnitude as it does in our eyes.

We know, by experience, how susceptible we are of a diversity of apprehension in this respect; and that at some periods, and in some situations, the same portion of time appears much longer than at others. In circumstances of extreme misery, the moments seem to linger, and the lapse of time is slow. How long would a few minutes appear, passed in excruciating torment! In a season of anxious expectation, which has a portion of misery in it, the same effect is experienced in a lower degree. On the contrary, in a state of enjoyment the hours seem to take wings, and we are but little sensible of the progress of time. When the mind is fully engaged on a delightful subject, when the attention is deeply absorbed in a pleasing train of reflection, we become scarcely conscious that any space of time has elapsed. We must infer from hence that perfect happiness diminishes inconceivably the impression of time; as on the contrary, intense misery increases it.

Among all the conceptions we form of the Supreme Being, there is none the propriety of which we can less doubt than of his perfect happiness; nor have any who have believed on him failed to ascribe to him this perfection in the highest possible degree. He is styled, in scripture, "the blessed and only Potentate," the happy God: and, as he is the fountain of all happiness to his

creatures, it resides in him as in its utmost plenitude—as in its proper seat. If his gracious presence is such a perpetual spring of felicity; if it is at "his right hand there are pleasures for evermore;" how much must he enjoy every moment in the contemplation of his perfections, in the survey of his works and designs, and in the possession of his consciousness of his supreme dominion and transcendent excellence, his unutterable and unbounded felicity!

Conceive, then, of a Being absolutely independent, and existing from eternity; in the enjoyment of infinite happiness, always master of his purpose, never perplexed with difficulty, never agitated with anxious expectation, resting on his own all-sufficiency, and viewing with complacency each attribute of his infinite fulness. What, then, is an age in his view, compared to what it is in the eyes of mortals? Surely, with such a Being "one day *must* be as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

Admiration is, in most instances, the offspring of ignorance; at least, it implies a limitation of the views; so that an object shall appear great in the contemplation of one man, which, to another of more elevated and capacious powers, shall appear small and inconsiderable. But, to an infinite understanding, nothing can appear great that does not partake of its own infinity. The Supreme Mind, and that alone, grasps eternity, possesses it every moment. He not only comprehends, but constitutes, eternal duration, by enduring "from everlasting to everlasting;" for there could be no eternal duration if something did not always endure: we cannot conceive of its existence but as a mode of being, and that being is God.

The measure by which he estimates time is, consequently, quite different from that which we are compelled to apply, in its contemplation. We measure one portion of duration by another; He measures time by eternity. How inconceivably different must be the apprehension arising from these different methods of considering it! In attempting to form a conception of endless duration,

we are under the necessity of accumulating ages upon ages, and multiplying millions of ages into millions; accompanied with this conviction, that we have arrived no nearer to an adequate comprehension of it; that there remains beyond us an infinitely larger space than we have travelled over. To this view it is every moment present: to him it is familiar, as his element, his habitation; and from that stupendous elevation, he looks down upon the scenes of time and the lapse of ages. These reflections may assist us to conceive, how to him one day must necessarily be as "a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

II. The use to which the doctrine of the text may be applied.

1. It removes the ground of objection against the fulfilment of the divine declarations, arising from the accomplishment being long delayed.

If some time is to be allotted for preparation, some space for operation, it surely belongs to God to determine of what extent it should be: this, perhaps, you will admit. But why so long a space? But in whose eyes is it long? In yours, who are but the creatures of a day, who are, from the narrowness of your views, liable to perpetual illusions and deception? or in God's? And, amidst this diversity of apprehension, can you hesitate in deciding which is correct?

No slackness in his purpose is then to be imputed to him according to what men account slackness; no unsteadiness in his resolution, no revolution of his determination.

Nothing is to be concluded in favour of the impunity of prosperous vice, nor of the final neglect of oppressed and afflicted piety. The prosperity of the wicked is but for a moment: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading like a green bay-tree: yet I passed by, and he was not; yea, I sought him out, but he could not be found."

2. It accounts for the peculiar cast of scripture language, when employed in announcing the coming of Christ, and the end of all things.

3. Though we cannot immediately change our senses, let us endeavour to conform our ideas and convictions to the dictates of Infallible Wisdom on this subject. Let us consider the whole duration of things here as very short.

The more we drink into the spirit of the Scriptures, the more will this be the case.

XXXIX.

THE LORD'S-DAY COMMEMORATIVE OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

Psalm cxviii. 24.—*This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

This Psalm appears to have been composed on David's accession to the dominion over all Israel; when he had subdued his enemies around, and completely established himself as a great and victorious prince. It was probably set to music on the anniversary of David's coronation. That was a most joyful event. As a very important passage in [this psalm] is applied to Christ, both by himself and his apostles, no doubt can be entertained of its referring, in its fullest and sublimest sense, to the person and kingdom of the Redeemer. In this light, I shall consider it in the following discourse: and as the Lord's-day is appointed to commemorate the resurrection of our Saviour, at which his kingdom commenced, I shall endeavour to invite your attention to those sources of religious joy which are opened by that event. The event which this day is designed to celebrate is calculated to afford joy on the following accounts:—

I. On this day the purchase of our redemption was completed.

In order to render the salvation of sinners consistent with the holiness and justice of the divine nature, some great moral expedient became necessary. The expedient which the Divine Wisdom adopted, was the substitution

of the Son of God in the room of sinners; who freely consented to assume our nature, and to sustain those sufferings which the Father deemed requisite for the satisfaction of his own justice, and especially the suffering of death. Though the merit of his obedience is more eminently ascribed in scripture to his death, ("He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,") yet we are justified in considering all the humiliation he endured, during his abode on earth, as forming a part of his merit, and, consequently, of the price of our redemption. His voluntary condescension in coming into our world, his assuming our nature itself, with all its infirmities and sorrows, formed an important part of his merit, because he was under no previous obligation to do it.

His merit, as far as it was the result of his sufferings, was composed of three parts :—

1. His assumption of human nature itself; which, as he was under no previous obligation of doing, was in the highest degree meritorious.

2. The endurance of evils, which were not necessarily included in it; such as poverty, contempt, and innumerable privations.

3. [His] death; the efficacy of which was specific, resulting not merely from it, as suffering, but as that precise species of suffering which the law inflicted on disobedience: "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die." "The wages of sin is death." The pain of death terminated when he cried, "It is finished!" but the humiliation still remained until his resurrection.

Justice is now satisfied, "the law is magnified and made honourable." The majesty of heaven and earth appear in the person of the Saviour, with an inviting benignity dressed in smiles proclaiming peace from the cross "to them that are nigh, and to them that are far off."

II. On this day the character of Christ was illustriously vindicated, and his pretensions fully asserted and sustained.

During his life he laboured under the accusation of

deceiving the people; his miraculous works were imputed to diabolical agency, and death [was] inflicted on him under the character of a blasphemer, because he affirmed himself to be the Son of God: He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."* "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I do these things."†

The grand proof of Christ's Messiahship is his resurrection.

To witness his resurrection was the principal office of the apostles: "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, until that same day that he was taken up, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."‡ It was the evidence to which he had himself appealed: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again."§ It was such an attestation of divine approbation as was never conferred before or since.

III. This day afforded to Christ a signal triumph over his enemies. During his abode in the grave, his enemies exulted, the world rejoiced, his disciples were rejected and dispersed. The desponding language of his disciples, on their way to Emmaus: "We thought it had been he that should have redeemed Israel; and, besides all this, it is the third day since these things were done." The hopes of the church were sunk to the lowest point of depression: it seemed as if the name of Jesus and his cause were for ever entombed in his grave. But how gloriously was the scene reversed by his resurrection! The person of the Saviour was for ever removed beyond the reach of further assault, and his cause was more than ever triumphant: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord

* Rom. i. 4. † John viii. 28.
‡ Acts i. 21, 22. § John ii. 19.

Jesus: and great grace was upon them all."* Greater miracles were wrought by the apostles, in his name, than any which he wrought himself. From thence we must date the extensive and successful propagation of the gospel. The Spirit descended, and the eleven apostles were sent forth into all the world. He then began to assume the sceptre of universal dominion, to sit upon the throne of David, to rule and to establish it for ever and ever. "All power was given unto him in heaven and in earth."

IV. On this day, our Lord gained an everlasting victory over the last enemy, and triumphed over death in that nature which had always been subject to its dominion before. Death had reigned, not only from Adam to Moses, but through all subsequent generations, subjecting the whole race, and trampling them with indignity in the dust. Millions and millions had descended into his dreary prison, of which none had ever been able to break the bars, and escape from the confinement. The king of terrors maintained an undisputed dominion, a despotic sway, over all the past generations of mankind. Some were indulged with a larger respite than others. Some descended into his mansions with more funereal pomp and pageantry; but when arrived there, they all met with the same reception: the same darkness enveloped them; and they equally said, "to corruption, Thou art my sister; to the worm, Thou art my mother." But on this day a new order of things commenced. Death, for the first time, encountered an enemy more powerful than himself; and though he seemed to prevail for a moment, he was for ever foiled in the conflict. He received into his territory, in the guise of a captive, him whom he found a conqueror. [Christ] exhibited the first specimen of immortal man: not that shadow of immortality, consisting in being remembered and celebrated for ages by creatures who are hastening to the tomb; but an immortality, consisting in a form which is imperishable,—a glorious being, over which

* Acts iv. 33.

death hath no more power, which will subsist in undecaying youth and splendour when the heavens are no more. This is the pattern and example to which the children of the resurrection will be conformed.

V. On this day we are called to rejoice in that sure and certain prospect which the resurrection of Christ affords to all true believers, of ascending with him to heaven, and of there partaking with him of his glory. As he was the substituted representative of true believers, what was accomplished in him at his resurrection, will, ere long, be accomplished in them: the victory over death which he acquired he will impart to them; the glory which he has received he will give to them; the eternal rest, into which he has entered at his ascension, he hath prepared for them:—"Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; then they that are Christ's at his coming." In nothing that our Saviour suffered or obtained, is he to be considered in the light of a private character. Nothing was suffered on his own account, or effected merely with a view to his own benefit. "As he bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and "died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God," the rewards which he merited, the dignity to which he was exalted, are not confined to his own person, but accrue to every part of his mystical body.

XL.

CHRIST'S CARE OVER CHURCHES AND MINISTERS.

Rev. ii. 1.—*These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*

As Jesus Christ is the "true light" of the world, so a principal means by which he dispenses his illumination, is by the appointment of a stated ministry, and the formation of christian churches. By concentrating and uniting their efforts; by collecting their information, their zeal and piety into a [point]; they dispel much of

the darkness of the present state. This state is frequently, in scripture, compared to night: "The night is far spent; the day is at hand."* During the prevalence of this darkness, previous to the rising of the "Sun of righteousness," he has placed his ministers as stars in the firmament, and appointed his churches to be as lamps or candlesticks.

By the representation of the text, we are strongly reminded of the sole end and design for which ministers are constituted and churches formed: it is to dispense spiritual illumination to a benighted world; it is that they may shine with knowledge and holiness. As far as they answer this purpose, they are useful and important; in proportion as they lose sight of it, they forfeit every just claim to esteem, and sink into insignificance and contempt. It is their duty to "hold forth the word of life."† The light they are appointed to dispense is the pure doctrine of Christ, exhibited by an open profession, and sustained and recommended by the virtues of a holy life. When churches depart from the essential truths of christianity, they become incapable of answering the end of their institution. They are no longer useful lights, but delusive meteors; which, instead of guiding souls to heaven, mislead and betray them to destruction.

False teachers are compared by Jude to "wandering stars,"‡ in opposition to those mentioned in the text, who are supposed to continue in their station, and afford a regular and steady light. In representing Christ's ministers under the metaphor of stars, it is not improbable there may be an allusion to Daniel: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."§

The appellation of "the bright and morning star" is assumed by our Saviour himself; and as ministers, though at an immeasurable distance, are yet nearest him

* Rom. xiii. 12. † Philip. ii. 16.
‡ Jude 13. § Dan. xii. 3.

in the official rank in the church, so ought they most to resemble him in the distinguishing features of the christian character. The church is represented as having on her head "a crown of twelve stars,"* which denote the twelve apostles. John saw seven of these stars and lamps: which may either refer to the precise number of the churches to whom Christ sent distinct epistles; or, as seems more likely, the number is adopted as a mystical number, agreeable to the arrangement of this book, which consists of seven seals, seven trumpets, seven vials, and contains a distinct [intimation] of the seven spirits that are before the throne. There is contained an allusion to the golden candlestick in the temple, which consisted of seven branches. "The eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth."†

Let us proceed to consider—

I. What is meant by our Lord's holding the stars, his ministers, in his hand.

His holding the stars in his hand implies the appointing them to the work of the ministry. His qualifying them for the successful discharge of it, and his absolute [disposal and direction] of them, and all their concerns.

1. It implies that it is he who appoints them to their office. From Him, as the sole Head of the Church, they derive their commissions. They are his servants and messengers. He sometimes describes them by appellations peculiar to the Jewish church;—as when he tells the Jews, "Behold I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes;"‡—but more frequently by titles peculiar to the New Testament. "When he ascended up on high, he gave some, apostles; some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."§ Hence St. Paul gives thanks to Jesus Christ, who had enabled him, "for that he counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry."||

2. It is he who imparts the qualifications which are necessary for the effectual discharge of their office:

* Rev. xii. 1. † Zech. iv. 10. ‡ Matt. xxiii. 34.
§ Ephes. iv. 8, 11. || 1 Tim. i. 12.

"And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."* All that love to souls, and that regard to the advancement of the divine honour, which are so essential to a Christian minister, proceed from him. Ministerial talents are his gift. The continual supplies of grace, which are requisite in the whole course of the christian ministry, proceed from him: "The supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus:"† "There are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord."

3. They are, with all their concerns, at his absolute disposal. He, by the secret arrangements of his providence, appoints "the bound of their habitation," and allots their respective fields of labour, not unfrequently in a manner entirely foreign from their expectation; so he assigns them the measure of their success, setting before them, on various occasions, "an open door, which no man can shut."‡ (Speak of the angel of the church of Philadelphia.)

II. The import of his walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks.

1. It imports an accurate inspection of the state [of every church], both as a society and as individuals. "I know thy works," is a declaration with which he frequently prefaces his admonitory epistles. Nothing in the behaviour of Christian churches escapes his notice, whose "eyes are as a flame of fire." He remarks the attention, or inattention, with which his messages are received; he observes who are formal and lukewarm, and who fervent and sincere in their worship; who are diligent in their attendance on the means of grace, and who are glad to avail themselves of trivial excuses for neglecting them. He notices all the different degrees of seriousness which professing christians bring into the divine service. There is not a sigh from the contrite, not a tear of penitential sorrow, or of tender joy, that escapes his notice. "He looks not at outward appearances, but at the heart." He perceives

* 1 Tim. i. 14. † Philip. i. 19. ‡ Rev. iii. 8.

the difference betwixt those churches which have left their "first love," and those who are diligently pressing on to perfection; betwixt those that are indifferent to the extension of his kingdom, and those who are incessantly labouring and praying for its enlargement; those who decline to the paths of error, and "hold the doctrine which he hates," and those who "hold fast the form of sound words."

2. His walking amongst them implies that his business, so to speak, lies in the management of his churches. It is his "building," his "husbandry,"* The interest of his church is peculiarly his interest, in the maintenance of which his presence and grace are especially exerted. He walks amongst the churches as a proprietor in his field.

He superintends the affairs of the world, but always with a view to the enlargement and prosperity of his church. The church is his mystical body, with which he is most intimately and inseparably united. He rules the world by his sceptre, but he gladdens the church by his presence. The former consists only of his subjects, this of his brethren and sisters.

3. His walking amongst them denotes the complacency he takes in them. Something of complacency seems to be implied in this expression, "I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people."†

(Apply the whole.)

*1 Cor. iii. 9. † Lev. xxvi. 11, 12

XLI.

NO TEMPLE IN HEAVEN.

Rev. xxi. 22.—*And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.*

This book contains a prophecy of the state of the church, from the time in which it was communicated, to the consummation of all things. It includes the principal revolutions to which it was to be subject, and the assaults it was to sustain, during a series of ages, from the time of John to the end of the world. The chapter out of which my text is taken, is, with great probability, considered as a description of the heavenly world. In the chapter preceding, we have a striking description of the day of judgement. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."* After this, a new heaven and a new earth was described very similar to the language of Peter: "For we look for a new heaven, and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness." The perfection of the state represented here is such as can agree only with the heavenly world. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."† Among the other privileges, access to the tree of life is specified, evidently denoting a state of immortality. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree

* Rev. xx. 11, 12. † Rev. xxi. 4.

of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."*

Considering this as a description of the heavenly state, we shall first endeavour to point out the meaning and import of this declaration, and next attempt some practical improvement.

I. Let us endeavour to point out the meaning and import of this declaration, "I saw no temple therein," &c.

1. It cannot be intended to insinuate that heaven will not be a state of devotion. It is in every part of the word of God, and in this book in particular, represented as a state of the highest and most exalted devotion.† Devotion will then be carried to its highest perfection. The absence of the temple does not denote the absence of devotion: as it is the noblest employment of creatures here, it is impossible to suppose it will be neglected in the heavenly world.

Nor is it intended to intimate, that there will not be most glorious and supernatural manifestations of God in that state. *Having* the glory of *God* is a most distinguishing part of its description. The peculiar presence of God is announced as one of its [especial] privileges.‡ "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell amongst them." Contrasting the present with the future state, the apostle says, "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: then shall I see as I am seen, and know as I am known."

The import of this declaration may probably be expressed in the following particulars. There will be no place in the celestial world, distinguished by peculiar tokens of the divine presence above others.

(1.) A temple is a building set apart exclusively for the honour of God, where he was accustomed to manifest his presence by a visible symbol, in distinction from other places. The ancient temple was divided into three compartments. The court, at the door of which stood the brazen altar of burnt offering. To this the victims

* Rev. xxii. 14 † Rev. xv. 2, 3; xiv. 2. 3. ‡ Rev. xxi. 3.

were brought, and the Israelitish people had access. The second was the court of the priests, at the farthest end of which stood, on one side, the golden altar of incense, and on the other, the table of the shew-bread. This it was the prerogative of the priests only to enter. It was styled in distinction from the other, "the Holy Place." The third was the *Sanctum Sanctorum*, or "Holy of Holies," where was placed the mercy-seat, surrounded on each side by the cherubim, whose wings were stretched out so as to cover it; and upon it the Supreme Being manifested himself in a visible glory, like a king sitting upon his throne. Hence he was invoked by the saints of old, as "he that sat between the cherubim." This, which was the inmost recess of the temple, was the chamber of audience, and the place of the oracle. And to this the high priest only had access, once a year, upon the great day of atonement, which was the tenth of the seventh month. No other part of the Holy Land was ordinarily favoured with similar manifestations. As it was the peculiar distinction of the temple at Jerusalem it conferred a [specific] sanctity on the place, whence it was styled the Holy City.

In heaven, the presence of God will not be restricted to a particular place: it will diffuse itself everywhere; in consequence of which the whole will become holy. There will be no part of it consecrated as a local temple, because the whole will be a temple. As it is said of the sun, that the city will have no need of it, because the Lord God will enlighten it, and the Lamb be the light thereof; so it will be with respect to [this] temple. The whole will be so illuminated with the glory of God, so adorned with the most impressive indications of his august presence, that there will be no distinction possessed by any part above another. Every region of it will be equally replete with the glory of God, which is the [thing] chiefly meant by the latter clause of the text, "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be the temple thereof." The inhabitants will have no occasion to remove from one place to another, or to approach to a particular spot, in order to [behold] the

glory of God; but, where they [are, they] will be alike sensible of his presence, and equally awed and transported by it. None will have occasion to adopt the language of the devout Psalmist, and say, "When shall I come and appear before God?" for they shall always appear before him alike; "they shall continually behold his face, and serve him day and night in his temple."

In the passage just now quoted, we find mention made of a temple; which is perfectly consistent with the declaration of the text, [in which] John declares he saw none. He is now describing heaven itself: in heaven he perceived no temple, no particular place assigned by way of distinction for the worship of God. In the former, he intends to represent heaven itself under the appellation of a temple.

(2.) A temple is distinguished by having certain services allotted to it, which it is unlawful to perform elsewhere. Thus, after the temple at Jerusalem was erected, it became criminal to perform certain rites of worship in any other place. The burning of incense, and the offering of sacrifice, were limited and restrained to that spot.* "Take heed to thyself that thou offerest not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest; but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there shalt thou offer thy burnt offerings, and there shalt thou do all that I command thee." "Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy oil, or of thy vine, or of the firstlings of thy herds, or of thy flock, nor any of the vows which thou vowest, nor thy free-will offerings, or heave offerings of thy hand; but thou must eat them before the Lord thy God, in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose."

No distinction will subsist betwixt the different mansions in our heavenly Father's house. As all will be equally holy, the same modes of worship will pervade the whole; and whatever will be suitable to one place will be suitable to all. In this sense, John saw no temple.

* Deut. xvi. 5: xv. 20; xii. 13.

(3.) During the continuance of the temple, regular sacred seasons were appointed, at which all the males of the nation were commanded to appear before God. Three times a-year, all the male part of the nation was ordered to present themselves before God at Jerusalem, the place which he chose to record his name. These periods were, the feast of the *passover*, the feast of *pentecost*, and the feast of *tabernacles*, or of ingathering at the close of the year. Besides these solemn anniversaries, there were certain hours of prayer, mentioned in the third chapter of Acts, at which devout men were wont to frequent the temple, to present their supplications to God: these were the third, the sixth (corresponding to our noon), and the ninth hour. In the heavenly world, no distinction of sacred times and seasons will be known: no weekly rest, no annual solemnities, will be longer recognized; the devotion of its blessed inhabitants will be one eternal Sabbath. "There remaineth a rest," *(a keeping of Sabbath,)* saith St. Paul, "for the people of God." Here the pious look forward with delight to the recurrence of the sacred day, when they may dismiss all earthly cares, and devote themselves more immediately to the service of the Most High: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go up unto the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand in thy courts, O Jerusalem!"

(4.) This declaration is probably intended to intimate, that devotion will no longer form a distinct part of the employment of the heavenly world, but that it will be intimately incorporated with all their actions and sentiments. In the present condition of our being, so many wants arise from the body, so many necessities of a worldly nature to be provided for, that it is but a small part of their time that many can devote to the offices of religion. We have two worlds with which we are concerned—the world that now is, and that which is to come; and these give birth to two distinct interests—the interests of the body, and those of the soul. Though the latter are infinitely the most important, the former cannot, and ought not, to be neglected: they demand

a large portion of our exertions, and, with too many, absorb the whole of their attention and solicitude. "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" is the general inquiry. Truly holy persons employ their hands upon the world, and set their hearts on heaven; but even these find it difficult, amidst the distractions and cares of the present state, to keep their affections set upon the things that are above. Their souls too often cleave unto the dust, and their hearts are sometimes overcharged. Nothing of that nature will be experienced there: "God will be all in all." No wants will there remain to be supplied, no dangers to be averted, no provision to be made for futurity. The contemplation and enjoyment of the Great Eternal will present an ample occupation of the mind for ever and ever.

It may seem, in our present dark and imperfect state, difficult to conceive how the exercises of the mind and heart on the blessed God can employ an eternity. But we must remember that the object is infinite; that the creation is but an atom or a point, compared to the immensity of his being and perfections; and if, in the survey and examination of the creation, the mind feels such ample scope, we need not wonder if its great Author supply an infinitely wider range of operation, when he lays himself open to the view of his creatures, and permits them to "see him as he is." When we possess an immediate and intuitive view of his nature and excellencies, and no longer see him "through a glass darkly, but face to face," no doubt, the powers of the soul will find full employment, without danger of feeling itself straitened, in him "who is all in all." There are, probably, faculties in the soul which are here either not apparent at all, or are very imperfectly developed. Among these, the powers of action and contemplation will be perfectly combined: the exercise of the reason will not interfere with that of the heart; but we shall be capable of feeling all the ecstasies of devotion, in conjunction with mental operations, with which it is at present scarcely compatible. We shall not wor-

ship at one time, and at another be engaged in active pursuits and employments; but while we burn with the highest ardours of devotion, we shall be capable of doing the will of God, of executing those mysterious purposes which it is his wish we should accomplish.

The pursuit of truth, the enjoyment of good, and the actual business of life, require distinct portions of time. While the soul is intensely employed in comparing its ideas, the movements of the heart languish, or are suspended. It is very difficult, in the present state, to be ardent and speculative, for the understanding and the heart to be both intensely engaged; but this is owing to the limitation of our capacity. It is incident to a state of imperfection, which we may easily suppose will be done away.

For a similar reason, the active pursuits of life are scarcely compatible with the attainment of knowledge. In our present gross, corporeal state, the effort necessary to keep up the animal machine in a state of intense exertion exhausts the vigour of the mind, and leaves little room for the powerful exercise of the reason. In eternity, we may readily conceive it will be otherwise: this inert and sluggish body will be replaced by a spiritual body; motion will be performed without fatigue; the body will be a fit instrument for executing the purposes of the soul.

At present, the occupations in which we are engaged have no immediate relation to the Deity; they are capable of being sanctified only by a general intention of pleasing God, while it is impossible to advert incessantly to his presence, or to make him always the immediate object of our thought. In eternity, the capacity will be so enlarged and extended, that the idea of God will be incessantly impressed, the beams of his glory will perpetually penetrate the heart, and the fire of love will never cease to burn upon the altar.

Improvement.

I. How impossible for undevout persons to be fitted

for heaven; how impossible for them to relish its employments or enjoyments.

II. How anxious should we be to improve the seasons of devotion and the means of grace, as a preparation for heaven.

III. What a well-founded hope of heaven may they indulge, who feel a supreme delight in the exercises of religion. Such are evidently ripening for an invisible and eternal state.

IV. Hence we perceive the exact correspondence of the employment of the heavenly world to the taste and disposition of real christians.*

* Preached at Leicester, Sunday morning, August 13th, 1815.

END OF VOL. V

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